

## Industry Flash

1 April 2009 | 8 pages

# India Wireless

## TDSAT Order – Too Little Too Late and A Non-Event

- Rights over 6.2Mhz?** — While stating that the GSM operators don't have rights beyond 6.2MHz, in the same breadth TDSAT has termed the interim subs criteria as "reasonable" and even questioned the need to give additional licenses and hinted at relaxed M&A rules. Given that allotted spectrum is unlikely to be taken back, worst case involves payment of a one-time fee, which given upcoming elections and legal challenges carries implementation risk. A one-time spectrum fee, assuming 4Mhz of excess spectrum allotted to Bharti and Rs16.5bn paid for pan-India 6.2MHz spectrum, comes to ~Rs11bn (Rs6/share). We therefore think the market's negative reaction to this news is unjustified. Bharti remains our Top Pick.
- Relaxation in M&A norms, the way out** — TDSAT, in the same order has also questioned the need to allocate new licenses given existing high competition, spectrum scarcity and low spectrum allotment/operator. It has therefore hinted to the DoT for relaxed M&A norms to achieve required spectrum efficiency.
- New sub-based spectrum criteria – ad hoc but reasonable** — While coming down on TRAI for lack of transparency on its revised subscriber linked spectrum allocation criteria, it also has held the interim criteria to be "reasonable".
- Technology neutrality** — TDSAT has stated that dual technology existed in the license terms and as such didn't find anything irregular in grant of GSM spectrum to RCOM/Tata-Tele. Although this removes the hangover on RCOM, we believe that too much water had flown under the bridge for TDSAT to have decided otherwise.

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Figure 1. Statistical Abstract

Company name	Rating	M Cap	Price (Rs)	P/E (x)		EV/EBITDA (x)	
		US\$M	1-Apr-09	FY09E	FY10E	FY09E	FY10E
Bharti	1L	23,491	626	14.7	11.5	8.3	6.3
RCOM	3H	7,126	175	6.0	9.5	6.7	6.9
Idea	2H	3,074	50	17.1	17.5	7.4	6.5

Source: Citi Investment Research and Analysis

See Appendix A-1 for Analyst Certification and important disclosures.

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## **Bharti Airtel (BRTI.BO; Rs625.80; 1L)**

### **Company description**

Bharti Airtel, through its group companies, provides cellular-phone services in all the 23 telecom circles of India. The group also provides fixed-line phone services, broadband, long-distance and enterprise services. The company is listed on The Stock Exchange, Mumbai (BSE) and The National Stock Exchange of India Limited (NSE). Major shareholders are Bharti Telecom, SingTel and Vodafone.

### **Investment strategy**

We rate Bharti shares Buy / Low Risk (1L). We believe continued robust wireless market expansion in India and Bharti's ability to capture this growth profitably will be a recurring theme. We estimate FY08-11E earnings CAGR of 23.7%, ahead of the broader market. We believe that competitive pressures, though intense, will remain rational as low revenue yields and moderate EBITDA margins leave little room for disruptive pricing. Additionally, most regulatory concerns are behind us and 3G recommendations, though discomfiting, cannot derail the growth path, in our view. The company has yet to fully realize benefits of economies of scale, though competitive intensity will prevent any margin gains. We also expect the towerco hive-off (Bharti Infratel) to be a value accretive looking beyond, though a bit back-ended.

### **Valuation**

Our target price of Rs900 is based on Mar-09E core DCF of Rs730 and a towerco option value of Rs170. The DCF is based on a WACC of 12% to reflect current macro environment, a terminal growth rate of 4% and beta of 0.9. We prefer DCF as our primary valuation methodology because the wireless market will likely continue to see robust growth requiring upfront capex but should generate significant free cash beyond FY09-10E. Our target price (standalone ex-towerco) represents a FY10E P/E of 14.2x, P/CEPS of 9.4x and EV/EBITDA of 7.9x.

### **Risks**

Our quantitative risk-rating system, which tracks 260-day share price volatility, rates Bharti shares as Low Risk. We are comfortable attributing a Low Risk rating for the following reasons: 1) Bharti has a track record of profitability and execution; 2) the company's capex plans are fully funded; and 3) SingTel's strategic shareholding leaves us comfortable with execution issues and initiatives. Risks that could prevent the stock from reaching our target price include competition-led tariff pressures, cut in termination fee, unremunerative capex and excessive bidding for 3G.

## IDEA Cellular (IDEA.BO; Rs50.15; 2H)

### Company description

Idea Cellular, a pure-play wireless provider, is the fifth-largest cellular operator in India. It has licenses to provide cellular-phone services in all the 22 telecom circles in India and an active presence in 12 of them. The company listed on the Indian bourse in March 2007 and is part of the Aditya Birla Group.

### Investment strategy

We rate Idea Hold/High Risk. Continued robust wireless market expansion and Idea's ability to regain its growth potential following its restructuring and full control by Aditya Birla Group are key factors in our investment argument. Idea's strong competitive position in its existing circles and comparable operational parameters provide us sufficient comfort in management's ability to execute its plans. We estimate FY08-11E EBITDA CAGR at 28.6%. In addition, the stake sale in ABTL and preferential allotment to Telekom Malaysia give it sufficient flexibility for its overall capex requirement to launch in new circles. However, on the flip side, Idea is still incurring coverage capex in its old circles, which reduces its operating leverage. Relatively weaker balance sheet compared to its larger peers reduces the funding flexibility in a tougher macro environment, thus constraining the valuation multiples.

### Valuation

Our target price of Rs56 is based on a core business value at Rs38/share and a towerco option value of Rs18/share through its 16% stake in Indus. Idea's core business is valued at 5.5x FY10E EV/EBITDA, a 30% discount to Bharti's imputed target FY10E EV/EBITDA. We believe that the high discount to Bharti is justified given 1) Margin impact of new circle launches - higher than expected impact of new launches (Mumbai/Bihar) in the current quarter and prolonged EBITDA breakeven in the previous 3 launches raise concern on NAV accretion from the new circles; 2) Additional leverage required to fund capex over next 1-2 years in the context of the ongoing current credit crunch; and 3) 3G auction carries event risk in relation to Idea's relatively weaker balance sheet.

### Risks

We assign a High Risk rating to IDEA Cellular. Several downside risks could impede the stock from reaching our target price, in our view. Operationally, risks facing Idea have increased given that it will need to incur higher capex in the new circles due to the coverage compulsions in the context of the ongoing current credit crunch. Besides, prolonged EBITDA breakeven in the new circles raises concerns on NAV accretion in the new launches. In addition the upcoming 3G auction carries an event risk of unduly straining the balance sheet (FY10E Net Debt/EBITDA already at 2.3x) in the event of aggressive bidding. Upside risks to our target price include higher than expected market share gains and faster EBITDA breakeven in new circles and moderate 3G bidding.

## Reliance Communications (RLCM.BO; Rs174.60; 3H)

### Company description

RCOM is an integrated player in the Indian telecoms sector. It was listed on the Indian stock exchanges following the de-merger of Reliance Industries. RCOM is the second-largest player in the mobile segment, has an 80,000km-long India-wide optic-fiber network and owns the FLAG submarine cable network. RCOM has three business units: 1) Wireless, which includes a nationwide wireless network on CDMA and GSM; 2) Global Business comprising wholesale voice and data; and 3) Broadband for both retail and enterprise.

### Investment strategy

We rate RCOM Sell/High Risk. Though RCOM has been benefiting from the continued wireless growth in India, it has been constrained by the CDMA network in terms of market share and elasticity. The change in consumer mix and market share gains depends on the proposed GSM foray. Though entry into GSM would help RCOM in gaining revenue market share, the gains at the operating level will be offset by the interest and depreciation arising from the significant capex. This could be accentuated by the fact that the capital work-in-progress is being funded by current liabilities presently. Besides, there are inherent risks in the execution of the dual network strategy (i.e. cost duplication, low market share gains) that cannot be wished away. RCOM is investing heavily in the Global Business, the returns for which might be back-ended. The hive-off of towers in a separate company (RTIL) has business potential though with increasing number of operators, and could unlock value in the medium term.

### Valuation

Our target price of Rs150 is based on a core business value of Rs108 and net towerco value accretion of Rs42. We usually value Indian wireless plays on DCF given the back-ended nature of profits and cash flow. For RCOM, however, we use EV/EBITDA. The core business value of Rs108 is based on 5.6x FY10E EV/EBITDA, a 30% discount to Bharti's implied target multiple (ex-towerco), the same as employed for Idea's target price computation. We believe the discount to Bharti is justified on account of the inherent risks of dual network, high hidden leverage, stretched FCF breakeven, and lack of clarity on accounting policies (especially related to finance income).

### Risks

Our risk-rating system, which tracks 260-day share price volatility, assigns a High Risk rating to RCOM, which we believe is appropriate given its high hidden leverage in the context to the current credit crunch, prolonged FCF breakeven given high capex plans and a lack of clarity on certain accounting policies. Upside risks to our target price include higher than expected market share gains in GSM and visibility on tenancy of RTIL with possible move towards value monetization. Easing of the macro credit environment and slower conversion of current liabilities to real debt would positively impact the earnings and sentiment on the stock.

# Appendix A-1

## Analyst Certification

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##### Ratings and Target Price History

##### Fundamental Research

Analyst: Rahul Singh  
Covered since April 28 2006

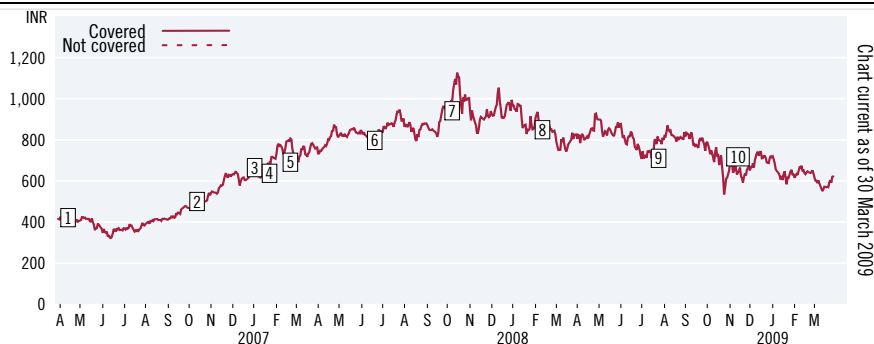


Chart current as of 30 March 2009

	Date	Rating	Target Price	Closing Price
1	13-Apr-06	1M	*500.00	395.95
2	12-Oct-06	*1L	*600.00	475.65
3	2-Jan-07	1L	*750.00	633.00
4	23-Jan-07	1L	*800.00	689.15

	Date	Rating	Target Price	Closing Price
5	21-Feb-07	1L	*960.00	806.30
6	20-Jun-07	1L	*1,050.00	824.65
7	8-Oct-07	1L	*1,200.00	984.80
8	12-Feb-08	1L	*1,150.00	855.80

	Date	Rating	Target Price	Closing Price
9	24-Jul-08	1L	*1,070.00	797.95
10	13-Nov-08	1L	*900.00	631.25

\* Indicates change

Rating/target price changes above reflect Eastern Standard Time

#### IDEA Cellular (IDEA.BO)

##### Ratings and Target Price History

##### Fundamental Research

Analyst: Rahul Singh  
Covered since April 12 2007



Chart current as of 28 March 2009

	Date	Rating	Target Price	Closing Price
1	12-Apr-07	*1L	*112.00	98.15
2	20-Jun-07	1L	*140.00	115.15
3	8-Oct-07	1L	*155.00	131.80

	Date	Rating	Target Price	Closing Price
4	6-Nov-07	*2L	*140.00	130.10
5	12-Feb-08	*1L	140.00	106.25
6	24-Jul-08	1L	*120.00	87.65

	Date	Rating	Target Price	Closing Price
7	20-Oct-08	*2M	*70.00	61.80
8	21-Nov-08	*2H	*56.00	44.20

\* Indicates change

Rating/target price changes above reflect Eastern Standard Time

**Reliance Communications  
(RLCM.BO)**

**Ratings and Target Price History**

**Fundamental Research**

Analyst: Rahul Singh

Covered since May 30 2006

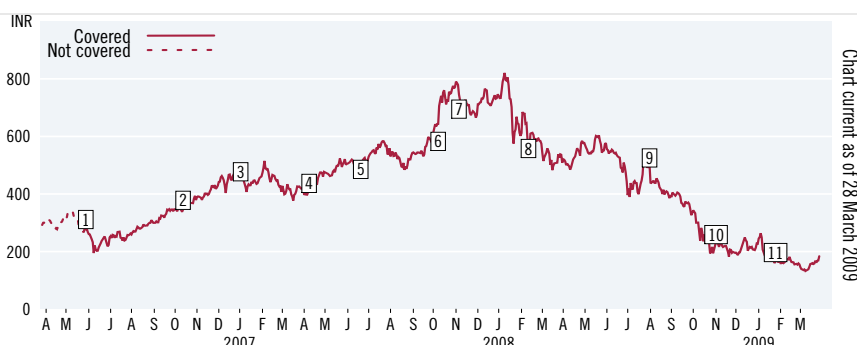


Chart current as of 28 March 2009

Date	Rating	Target Price	Closing Price
1 29-May-06	*1M	*360.00	276.25
2 12-Oct-06	1M	*430.00	345.95
3 2-Jan-07	1M	*570.00	470.75
4 9-Apr-07	1M	*510.00	415.60

Date	Rating	Target Price	Closing Price
5 20-Jun-07	1M	*600.00	505.90
6 8-Oct-07	*1L	*750.00	640.90
7 6-Nov-07	*2L	*835.00	745.40
8 12-Feb-08	*1L	*760.00	575.70

Date	Rating	Target Price	Closing Price
9 31-Jul-08	*2L	*530.00	500.05
10 2-Nov-08	*2H	*270.00	220.70
11 26-Jan-09	*3H	*150.00	160.15

\* Indicates change

Rating/target price changes above reflect Eastern Standard Time

Rahul Singh, Analyst, holds a long position in the securities of Bharti Airtel.

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