

Post Covid, RailTel speeds on new track; taps scope in virtual education, healthcare

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RailTel, a ₹1,166-crore PSU incorporated in 2000 as a pure-play broadband service provider along railway tracks, is seeing its fortunes gather speed in virtual education and health, partly prompted by Covid-triggered trends that have accelerated digital usage in these sectors.

The enterprise, which has linked over 700 educational institutions through piped-broadband and several universities through WiFi, is exploring a bigger role in the digital education space.

The opportunities it is eyeing include the Digital Literacy Programme of Kenya, which entails providing digital devices to students and teachers.

E-education initiatives

“We are also in discussions with the Ministry of Human Resource Development for

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PUNEET CHAWLA
CMD, RailTel



providing end-to-end e-learning systems to schools,” Puneet Chawla, CMD, RailTel, told *BusinessLine*.

The debt-free company is additionally working on a Hospital Management and Information System (HMIS), which will customise clinical data for laboratories, with a multi-hospital feature that enables cross-consultation. HMIS will also offer a seamless interface with medical and other equipment, and let patients access their medical records on their mobile devices. “We will implement it in 125 health facilities and 650 polyclinics of the Railways,” said Chawla.

RailTel saw the demand for broadband grow exponentially amid the pandemic. “Several behavioural changes ushered in due to the pandemic are going to stay,” said Chawla.

“We implemented a tele-consultation project in Delhi’s Northern Railways hospital. I believe this model will stay. For minor issues, patients do not need to travel (even in urban areas).”

Also, RailTel is evaluating a railway project in Bangladesh and business opportunities in the Mauritius, particularly in the healthcare segment. “We intend to become a platform for regulators and fintech pro-

viders and implement these applications in other developing countries,” added Chawla.

The demand for tech-enabled platforms increased the need for broadband services, high bandwidth and data centres — areas where the mini-ratna operates.

Rivals, friends

RailTel, which competes with large telcos such as RJio, Airtel and Vodafone Idea, is described by Crisil as a “neutral” service provider.

On competition from big telcos, Chawla said: “We are present in remote areas (where) no other player is present. We are there wherever a rail track is there. In those parts, they (telcos) take our services. We also share infrastructure. We provide services to all service providers without any bias. We also take services from all on a competitive bidding basis.”