



Read Shuchi Bansal's earlier columns at
livemint.com/ordinarypost

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING JAWAHAR GOEL

If all goes well, Jawahar Goel, chairman and managing director of direct-to-home (DTH) service provider Dish TV, will be presiding over the company formed after the merger of Videocon d2h and Dish TV—named Dish TV Videocon Ltd. It goes without saying that the merger will create a leading satellite distribution platform in India. Dish TV Videocon is expected to serve 27.6 million net subscribers in India, out of a total of 175 million TV households, said a release from the company when it announced the proposed merger a couple of months ago. In a statement, Goel said that “this transaction, that brings together two powerhouse brands of the cable and satellite industry in India, will provide us with a gateway to harness growth opportunities in an ultra competitive multi-player environment. This combine will enhance value for all stakeholders—consumers, government, employees and shareholders.”

However, he's unwilling to offer further comments on the deal as it awaits regulatory clearances, including from the Competition Commission of India (CCI).

Goel, viewed as a pioneer in the broadcast distribution sector in India, has had an incredible journey from the time he first launched Zee's cable network (Siti Cable) more than 20 years ago from the Lawrence Road office from where the family's trading business was conducted. The year was 1993 and media baron Subhash Chandra's younger brother had already proved his mettle in the family's rice export business. He was then entrusted with the task of creating a cable network to distribute content after the successful launch of Hindi entertainment channel Zee TV in October 1992.

One of his admirers from a rival cable company, who doesn't want to be named, says Goel understood the value of a sturdy pipeline to deliver content very early on. And he did not shy away from getting his hands dirty in learning the ropes of the cable business. “He himself used to open the boxes carrying cables and amplifiers that we imported,” recalls Sunil Khanna, who worked closely with Goel both at Siti Cable and later at Dish TV. “He's

mint COLUMN

always been a hands-on man and personally oversaw the installation of cable and head-ends,” Khanna adds. That is not all. While he was leading cable, Goel understood that the industry needed to have a unified voice if it had to survive. He was instrumental in setting up the MSO Alliance, a lobby body of multi-system operators or the large cable networks in the early 2000s. Even as he set up Siti Cable as an MSO, he won the trust of the small cable operators. “Local cable operators were worried that Siti may affect their business. But they were assured that their interests will be protected and they trusted him. Jawahar ji is still much loved by the cable fraternity, which continues to seek his advice. In more than 20 years, he hasn't changed despite his success,” says Khanna. Goel is known for building lasting relationships. “I've noticed that people stick to him,” says Salil Kapoor, former chief operating officer of Dish TV who is now managing director at the international video streaming platform Hooq. “He's very grounded and always keeps communications channels open,” he adds. Today, Goel runs a formidable DTH business which has a market cap of more than Rs9,000 crore. Dish TV, launched in 2003, was India's first DTH platform and among the first to become Ebitda positive in an industry which is capital intensive and asset heavy. “To scale up DTH with a tight control on costs is one of his biggest achievements,” says Kapoor. In the complex and tough distribution industry, Goel is both venerated and acclaimed as a seasoned professional. What has also held him in good stead over the years is his impeccable technical knowledge even though, growing up in Hisar in Haryana, he had little formal education and no background in engineering. “Whether it is about satellites or set-top boxes, his technical knowledge runs deep. Even on the programming side, he is able to understand the potential of channels that could do well on the platform,” says Kapoor.

A grassroots entrepreneur in the true sense of the word, Goel is liked by all. He is not prone to losing his temper at work but becomes silent when he's upset, say people who have worked with him. The importance of Goel can also be judged from the fact that his inputs are sought on key regulatory issues and policy matters by the government because of his experience in the broadcasting, cable and DTH industries. He served as president of the Indian Broadcasting Foundation for four consecutive years in the past. Now that he's on the verge of creating one of the world's largest DTH services with the proposed merger of Videocon and Dish TV, the platform will have tremendous negotiating power with content owners owing to its sheer size. Together the two brands will enjoy an edge in distribution and acquire more market share even as the nuances of the execution of the merger are attended to.

Even though Goel says he's 62 and already on an extension, he is sure to see this deal through. His admirers say that people like him don't retire.

Shuchi Bansal is Mint's media, marketing and advertising editor. Ordinary Post will look at pressing issues related to all three. Or just fun stuff.