

# The barriers are coming down



A widely held belief amongst social scientists seems to be the fact that the institution of the nation state is crumbling under increasing pressure coming from globalisation. And yet, when it comes to economic policy, national barriers still figure prominently in the vast majority of the world's legislations - and the satellite industry is certainly no exception to this. However, recent events seem to suggest that things might be about to change even in protection-prone Asia.

International co-operation between space and satellite companies is becoming ever more popular. In India, for example, EADS Astrium and Antrix, the commercial arm of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), have recently signed a contract to provide a communication satellite for the international market.

The aim of the alliance between EADS Astrium and Antrix/ISRO which builds on the proven expertise of both Indian and European companies, is to jointly offer communications satellites in the market segment around 4kW of payload power and with a launch mass of two to three tonnes. This co-operation combining Indian platforms along with European payloads is designed to offer optimal, flexible and cost effective solutions to telecommunications operators.

The first success of this alliance is demonstrated by the award of the W2M satellite contract by Eutelsat Communications. W2M will be delivered to Eutelsat in 26 months for launch in the second quarter of 2008.

This is a breakthrough for the partnership between the European and Indian space technology organisations, which together have won their first commercial export contract. But above all it testifies to the fact that the Indian space sector, which so far has been jealously closed to the world, is finally opening to Western

technologies - as well as making inroads into Western markets, of course.

But international co-operation is not the only example of the 'crumbling' of national borders. Perhaps more importantly, we are finally witnessing the creation of a truly regional (meaning 'supra-national') satellite market. The most interesting example in this sense is the recent buyout of Thailand's Shin Corp by Temasek Holdings of Singapore. Things are not clear yet, as the sale of the telecom conglomerate company by the country's Prime Minister has caused a lot of controversy in Thailand. At the time of going to press, in fact, the political situation in Thailand is still hot and the buyout has yet to be approved by the country's regulation authorities. However, should the deal receive the go-ahead, Asia could well end up with the first truly regional satellite operator encompassing resources that span from Singapore and Australia to Thailand. Temasek Holdings is the investment arm of the Singaporean government that also controls SingTel, while Shin Corp controls Thailand's satellite operator Shin Satellite.

At *Satellite Evolution Asia (SEA)* we do not take sides on this issue: we believe that it is the responsibility of the Thai authorities to decide whether such a deal has all the necessary requirements to be approved. Besides, it is not even clear yet what would happen to the satellite entities as an industrial plan for the new conglomerate is yet to be made public and the parties involved are unwilling to talk to the press.

All we can say at this stage is that the creation of a regional satellite operator is an event we would follow very closely and that we would report on with great interest. ■

**Giovanni Verlini**  
Managing Editor