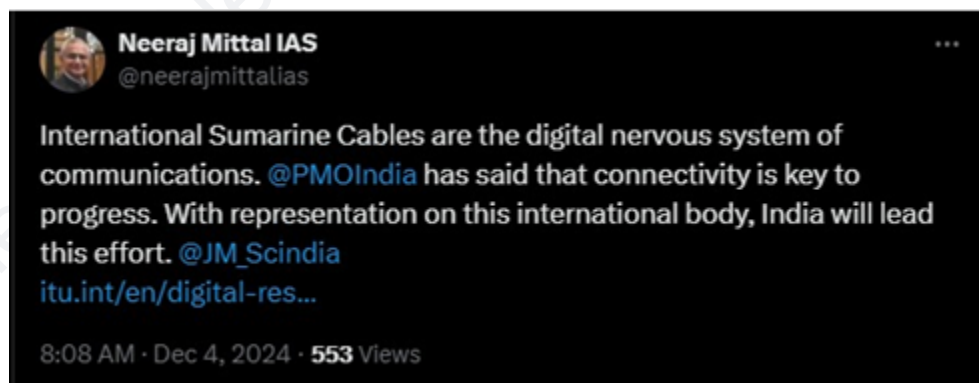


## International Advisory Body Formed to Strengthen the Resilience of Submarine Telecom Cables

Submarine telecommunication cables, the lifeline of global communication, are facing a significant challenge. Approximately 99% of internet traffic and critical services such as commerce, finance, government operations, digital health, and education rely on these cables. However, they are vulnerable to damage, with an estimated 150-200 faults occurring globally annually. This is a problem that requires a coordinated international response.

Stepping up to the challenge, the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the International Cable Protection Committee (ICPC) have combined their expertise and leadership. They have jointly launched the International Advisory Body for Submarine Cable Resilience, a crucial initiative aimed at bolstering the resilience of these indispensable cables.





### **Advisory Body's Role and Global Representation**

The newly formed International Advisory Body will proactively work towards promoting best practices across governments and industries to improve cable resilience, reduce risks of damage, and ensure the swift repair and deployment of these vital systems. The Advisory Body will also

provide strategic guidance to address challenges related to increasing traffic, aging infrastructure, and growing environmental threats to submarine cables.

With 40 members from around the world—including ministers, heads of regulatory authorities, and senior experts in telecommunications—the body reflects a diverse global perspective. Members come from all regions to represent the voices of small island nations and large economies. The collective experience of the body, with its diverse representation, will help address the needs of those whose livelihoods depend on submarine cables, as well as those responsible for deploying, maintaining, and protecting this critical infrastructure.

### **Leadership and Meetings**

H.E. Minister Bosun Tijani, Minister of Communications, Innovation, and Digital Economy of Nigeria, will co-chair the advisory body with Prof. Sandra Maximiano, Chair of the Board of Directors of Portugal's National Communications Authority (ANACOM).

The body will meet at least twice yearly to consult on international policies, telecommunications infrastructure, and best practices for improving resilience. The inaugural virtual meeting is scheduled for 12th December 2024, followed by a physical meeting at the Submarine Cable Resilience Summit in Abuja, Nigeria, in February 2025.

### **India's Role in Submarine Cable Infrastructure**

India's role in the global submarine cable network is significant. The country hosts around 17 international subsea cables across 14 distinct landing stations in Mumbai, Chennai, Cochin, Tuticorin, and Trivandrum. As of the end of 2022, these cables' total lit capacity and activated capacity stood at 138.606 Tbps and 111.111 Tbps, respectively, underscoring India's substantial contribution to global connectivity.

Indian telecom operators involved in submarine cable infrastructure include:

- Tata Communications owns five cable landing stations in Mumbai, Chennai, and Cochin.
- Global Cloud eXchange (formerly Reliance Globalcom) owns stations in Mumbai and Trivandrum.
- Reliance Jio has cable landing stations in Chennai and Mumbai, and new projects are underway.
- Bharti Airtel operates stations in Chennai and Mumbai and lands the 2Africa/EMIC-1 and SEA-ME WE 6 cables.
- Sify Technologies and BSNL operate various cable landing stations.
- Vodafone and IOX plan to construct a new cable landing station in Puducherry.

### **About ICPC**

The **International Cable Protection Committee (ICPC)**, founded in 1958, is a global forum for governments and commercial entities involved in the submarine cable industry. Its primary mission is to enhance the security of undersea cables by providing a platform for exchanging technical, legal, and environmental information.

## **Background on Submarine Cable Resilience**

Submarine cables form the foundation of global communications, linking continents and connecting markets. As of 2024, more than 500 active and planned submarine cable systems are operating, efficiently transmitting vast amounts of data.

These modern cables are designed to efficiently transmit vast amounts of data over long distances. The outer protective layer shields against environmental hazards such as deep-sea pressure, corrosion, and marine activity, while the core fiber strands are optimized for high-speed data transmission with minimal signal loss. This infrastructure is indispensable for real-time financial trading, video conferencing, and live-streaming applications.

A submarine cable can take over two years to become operational from design to deployment. This timeline is influenced by a combination of factors, including securing funding, navigating permitting and regulatory requirements, and addressing environmental and operational requirements.

However, this infrastructure faces increasing challenges due to environmental hazards, aging systems, and complex regulatory environments.

In 2023, over 200 submarine cable repairs were reported globally, highlighting the vulnerabilities of this critical infrastructure. Disruptions to submarine cable systems can have far-reaching consequences for millions,

including economic instability, security concerns, and internet access disruptions.

### **ITU's Contribution to Global Resilience**

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU), as the UN agency for digital technologies, recognizes the vital role submarine cables play in global communications. ITU is at the forefront of efforts to enhance the resilience of these cables through cooperation, standard-setting, and technical guidance. Through the International Advisory Body on Submarine Cable Resilience, ITU aims to develop best practices for securing submarine cable infrastructure, addressing cable maintenance, damage prevention, rapid recovery after disruptions, and adopting sustainable industry practices.

*Reference: PIB*