

Government may decide on 4G spectrum allocation to MTNL, BSNL by Dec

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The government is expected to decide on spectrum allocation for [4G](#) services to public sector firms BSNL and MTNL by this year-end, telecom minister [Manoj Sinha](#) said Tuesday. "I fully agree that survival of BSNL and MTNL without 4G spectrum is tough. There are some decisions of the apex court. We have made a strategy to settle them. I will try by end of this year, it should not be in 2019 but in 2018, the government should decide on the allocation of 4G spectrum," Sinha said at a conference organised by MTNL Mazdoor Sangh.

The conference was organised to work out ways to revive the loss-making telecom firm MTNL.

The union and the management of the firm requested the government to take back unutilised land and assets valued at around Rs 19,300 crore and pare its debt of around Rs 19,000 crore.

MTNL Chairman and Managing Director P K Purwar requested the government to grant it 4G spectrum in lieu of equity worth around Rs 6,500-7,000 crore and extend its mobile licence which is expiring in 2019 till 2021.

On proposals of MTNL union leaders and the management, Sinha said any change in an organisation or project begins from itself and there is a need to introspect on option available for the revival of the PSU.

Sinha hinted that in existing cut-throat competition in the mobile services market, it will be tough for MTNL to earn revenue but there are other segments where MTNL is strong.

"We have FTTH as an option which can be a major source of revenue for us. The second opportunity, we can have in Internet telephony. BSNL has started but it is not being able to implement it fully. But I feel this is a big opportunity for MTNL," Sinha said.

MTNL Human Resource Director Sunil Kumar said that the company has around 4,000 kilometres of optical fibre laid in Delhi and around 5,000 kilometres in Mumbai while other operators do not even have one-tenth of this capacity.

"We can monetise this. MTNL had 14 lakh broadband customers and now it has only 5 lakh. If we can get back 9 lakh customers either on fibre, it has potential to give us revenue of Rs 1,000 crore every year," Kumar said.

He said that there is a waiting list of customers in the enterprise division who can be given quick service.

Purwar said that MTNL is giving best offer to customers but unable to get them on board because of service issues and marketing. He said that the company now offers minimum download speed of 8 Mbps.

Purwar said MTNL needs to improve marketing for which both management and employees need to get involved.

The minister said that it will become tough for a common man to use telephone and broadband service in absence of BSNL and MTNL.

"The competition exists till the time BSNL and MTNL are there. Hence, the existence of BSNL and MTNL is necessary," Sinha said.

Referring to the surrender of MTNL unused land and building proposal, Sinha said the assets have been allocated by the government with a special objective. "How can land use be changed, this we need to work in detail to find out the solution."

MTNL Mazdoor Sangh General Secretary Dharm Raj Singh said that the company has in the past contributed revenue to the tune of Rs 45,000 crore to the national exchequer and the existing problem that it is facing is due to erroneous decisions taken by the government.

He said that the government needs to take a decision to bail out MTNL from the current situation and also look at the merger of the company with BSNL.

Singh said that employees in MTNL have come from the Department of Telecom and they should be treated at par with the department's employee in terms of wages and allowances.