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We plan to offer 4G services by March 2015: BSNL's Anupam Shrivastava

By Danish Khan | 27 April 2014, 6:43 PM IST



NEW DELHI: State-run telecom service provider BSNL is overhauling its operations in a bid to become competitive in the market. The telco is also planning to offer high-speed 4G services through the convergence of its wireline and wireless capabilities.

In an interaction with ET Telecom's Danish Khan, BSNL's Director-Consumer Mobility, Anupam Shrivastava talks about the company's plans for the Indian 4G market, network overhaul, new network and devices deals, synergy with MTNL and the enterprise segment.



Shrivastava would be taking charge of the company as its CMD on July 1, 2014.

Edited excerpts:

ET: What are BSNL's plans for providing 4G services?

Anupam: 2014 is going to be a transition year for BSNL, as we are overhauling our operations and upgrading our networks. We are looking at convergence of our wireless and wireline networks to provide high speed data 4G services.

We have broadband spectrum in 16 circles. However, we are not looking at providing 4G services through spectrum route anytime soon.

By March 2015, we are targeting to roll out 4G services in the country through the convergence route. Meanwhile, our 3G services are improving very fast. The immediate needs and data demand would be met by 3.5 G and 3.75 G services.

Once our business grows up, we would look at investing in the LTE route.

We are looking at 2 years from now to go for LTE for providing 4G services. The whole industry too is looking at the timeline of 1-1.5 years for 4G to really pick up.

ET: BSNL is sitting on huge telecom infrastructure. How it plans to monetise it?

Anupam: We are probably the second biggest tower infrastructure provider with over 65,000 towers and looking at sharing this infrastructure with the private operators. We are in discussion with Reliance Jio Infocomm for renting out our tower infrastructure across the country.

We have a huge land assets as well, which we are looking to utilise and monetisation. Additionally, we have factory assets, which very few telecom operators have. We have about 6-7 factories, which we aim to monetise through contract manufacturing. We have got these factory premises at very good locations.

We have training centers also all over the country, which could be lend to other players for educational purposes.

BSNL: How operational overahaul can help BSNL to provide better services?

Anupam: With effect of our network upgradation and overall overhaul, BSNL aims to provide seamless data connectivity. Data services that can be functionally segregated are what customer needs and we want to offer those services to them. We are making our networks compatible to such service by introducing Policy and Charging Rules Function (PCRF).

We have already finalised the tender and PCRF installation is going. In 2-3 months, PCRF would be here. It is in very advanced stage, with few minor issues, which is holding it. In the month of May, it could be commissioned and by July you would be seeing functional data services from BSNL. ZTE is the vendor, which we have shortlisted that being the lowest bidder for the tender.

ET: By When BSNL expects to become a profitable entity?

Anupam: We are still EBITDA positive and not making operational loss. Most of the losses are coming from the depreciation of huge assets, which we had taken from the Government.

We have prepared a plan and we see that by 2018, we should be in a position to even overhaul the depreciation loss and be in a positive situation.

ET: How synergy with MTNL helping BSNL to bolster its presence in Enterprise segment?

Anupam: Synergy with MTNL has given us a pan-India presence, which is crucial for the success of Enterprise services.

Private telcos are also present in the space and are offering huge discounts, knowing that business potential is enormous.

BSNL, being a government entity, suffered from the legacy mindset, and couldn't really reaped profits. We are now changing our strategy and now telling enterprise that whatever private telcos offer, we are going to give 5 percent discount on that.

We know that there's a lot of margin in the enterprise segment unlike voice and data. Our enterprise business is going pretty well. Earlier, we had two partners for the enterprise-Sai Infosystem and Dimension Data. Sai Infosystem couldn't do well, and now we are transferring their part to Dimension Data.

ET: Is BSNL planning to take synergy with MTNL beyond Enterprise segment?

Anupam: We are also looking at synergy with MTNL for our mobile network. BSNL services are at par with private telcos, if not better.

The main problem is in Mumbai and Delhi because of MTNL, which has patchy coverage. MTNL because of some issues couldn't do capital expenditure for many years. Synergy with them on network front would allow us to improve our network in these two metro circles.

ET: Is BSNL planning to rope in smartphone vendors for providing bundled services?

Anupam: Manufacturers of smartphones need to join hand with operators. But, there's need of deeper collaboration. BSNL is also collaborating with companies like Pantel.

We are approaching Micromax and Nokia, Samsung. However, we are not able to match the deals of private telcos but asking them to join hands with BSNL.

We are close to cutting deals with these smartphone vendors.

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