राष्ट्र हित   विभाग हित   अधिकारी हित

All India Graduate Engineers & Telecom Officers Association
Central Headquarter, New Delhi
(A Recognised Association of BSNL Executives)
(Affiliated to BMS)

Regn. no. HR/019/2018/02138

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GS / AIGETOA / 2024-25 / 41   **Dated 29.07.2024**

To,
Shri Ravi A Robert Jerad,
The Chairman & Managing Director
Bharat Sanchar Bhawan, New Delhi.

Subject: AIGETOA's Full Support and Strategic Suggestions to improve the network for Achieving BSNL's 25% Market Share Goal, regarding.

Respected Sir,

At the outset, we congratulate you on your new role as CMD BSNL and extend a warm welcome to BSNL family on behalf of all executives of BSNL. We commend the ambitious target of management to achieve a market share of 25% by 2025, up from the current 8.5%. This is indeed and uphill task given the challenges which BSNL is facing. **However, we are very sure that the management and employees together can definitely achieve this dream under the able leadership of your good-self.**

We wish to state that each and every employee is willing to work fulltime and beyond time contrary to the general perception being created about BSNL employees all these years. BSNL possesses the set of employees who have rich and varied experience across various technologies/platforms and have full potential to achieve the various targets extended to it by Government of India including the ambitious target of rolling out Swadeshi 4G/5G Network. **We take this opportunity to reaffirm the commitment and cooperation of all employees in achieving the various envisaged milestones and we firmly state that there will not be any lagging on the part of BSNL employees to achieve the uphill task.**

In this backdrop, we would like to put forth our suggestions especially to **achieve the goal of increasing the market share to 25%, we need to at least double the capacity of both our RAN and Core networks**. Additionally, it is crucial to address and strengthen all issues in our customer onboarding solutions, such as Sanchar Aadhar. Further, BSNL must explore various out of box initiatives to increase the revenue share and tap the vast opportunity available in the market.

At the same time, we also feel that keeping the vast human resource of BSNL in a motivated state is also an absolute necessity. BSNL must consider investing some amount in Human Resource also which will definitely reap the returns on investment with increased productivity and increased efficiency. We are hereby attaching various suggestions with regard to various initiatives which

BSNL must take for achieving the revenue growth faster as suggested by our members working at field units (Annexure-I).

We also take this opportunity to convey our heartfelt thanks to our Hon'ble Secretary Telecom for his open appreciation of BSNL employees through his twitter handle and we assure that each and every employee is fully committed to the cause of BSNL and we will definitely fulfill all those expectations which government is having for the growth and development of BSNL.

We remain confident that under your leadership and stewardship, the much-cherished vision of regaining the pristine glory of BSNL shall be achieved and also our long pending HR issues shall be resolved.

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With Regards,

Sd/-
[Ravi Shil Verma]
General Secretary

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Copy to:

1. **Dr Neeraj Mittal, Secretary, Department of Telecom for kind information please.**
2. **Shri Ravindra Himte Ji, General Secretary, Bhartiya Mazdoor Sangh for kind information please.**

AIGETOA Suggestions with respect to various initiatives which BSNL must take to achieve the increase in revenue:

1. Issues in Phase IX.2 Indigenous 4G Project:

The Phase IX.2 indigenous 4G project is a flagship initiative by the Government of India and is crucial for BSNL's revival. However, this phase presents significant challenges that must be addressed for successful execution as this is Project which is not only critical for BSNL but also for the whole nation. Proper expertise allocation is essential for effective planning and project implementation.

Integrating our existing multi-vendor CM network, which includes technologies from Nokia, ZTE, Huawei, and others, with the newly developed indigenous TCS/CDOT technology is big challenge. Furthermore, TCS, unlike multinational vendors, is relatively new to telecom core product development. The combination of a relatively new vendor and a new BSNL team makes it particularly challenging to manage and execute the project effectively. **Hence number of technical trainings may be increased and only need based transfer of the employees may be done instead of current policy of rotational transfers even without need due to which operations of the deficit circles, specialized circles and tenure circles are getting very much effected.**

It is a known fact that customers are opting BSNL after the beta launch of indigenous 4G and due to tariff hike by private operators. **Now our prime focus must be on to retaining them and for that we have to improve our network by optimization of all new on air 4G sites immediately along with installation & Commissioning.** M/s TCS must be instructed immediately to depute their manpower for optimization of all the 4G sites. In addition to that new 4G/5G supported Drive test kits must be procured and exclusive drive test team must be formed at OA level for regular optimization. Also, M/s TCS should also make sure that our existing 2G/3G networks are optimized after changing their antenna with new antenna. There must be some mechanism to deal with poor quality of workmanship also. The maintenance team of old running 2G/3G BTSs must also be kept working and functional to keep the uptime of the existing network almost to 100 %.

We have almost shifted from copper to fiber network. For each and every thing like Mobile, EB, LC, FTTH etc we are dependent on the transmission team as a backbone network. **There is the need of the hour to strengthen transmission team along with resources to maintain uptime high of each node**.

Further, to overcome these challenges, BSNL needs a proactive approach to strengthen its manpower for Phase IX.2 project-related activities. This includes creating a dedicated team for project planning and rollout. Such an initiative will enhance coordination, streamline efforts, and address workforce limitations, contributing to the successful implementation of the 4G projects. The follow up with Mobile handset Manufacturers to provide patch for 700 MHz band to support BSNL 4G/LTE services must be aggressively followed. Additionally low cost 4G handsets, 4G dongles which support 700 MHz band can be bundled together with services to provide greater flexibility to the customers.

Recently BSNL was allocated trial license 700 MHz band (Band 28) , we installed hundreds of 4G sites which are ready to be radiated, but due to trial license, we cannot commercially launch which will cater lakhs of customers who have recently opted into to BSNL. We are using this 5 Mhz of 2100 band during our 3G services launch back in 2008. Allocation of commercial license to this additional spectrum in this Prime 4G band (Band 1) will be much appreciated to better augment our BSNL network. While private TSPs have procured 30-40 MHz and are using advance technologies like carrier aggregation & massive MIMO to provide very good data services to the Mobile users, we are providing data with just 5 MHz of spectrum, which was allocated very long back.

Another issue which is to be addressed immediately is the congestion at GGSN level, which caters to 4 Circles of South India. GGSN & IMS core is to be upgraded to relieve congestion at the earliest. Further, lot of Huawei 2G/3G hardware is being used throughout ROTN. They have handover/reselection/fast return issues with the new TCS equipment's. Scrapping / Swapping all of these hardware isn't practically possible. So solution for this also needs to be found out.

If the recently ported-in customers, due to the tariff hike of other TSPs, are not given seamless services, they may leave BSNL once the validity of the recharge vouchers are over. Hence, it is paramount on the part of BSNL to address these issues.

The understanding with major Infrastructure Provider (IP) such as ATC is still pending leading to the uncertainty over 4G up-gradation at these IP sites. Therefore, BSNL management must take all the IP partners on board to complete the project smoothly.

2. Addressing Technical Issues with BSNL International Roaming Services:

BSNL is currently facing several technical challenges with its international roaming services. Unlike other telecom service providers (TSPs), BSNL does not have direct international roaming agreements with global partners. The existing agreements are limited to the Kolkata Circle IMSI range, necessitating a workaround method to provide international roaming services to customers from other circles. This arrangement requires the issuance of dual SIM cards to customers, leading to complications and numerous user complaints regarding the lack of seamless international roaming.

Further complicating the issue, BSNL provides 4G International Roaming Dual IMSI SIM cards to both prepaid and postpaid customers. However, these customers' handsets are typically set to auto mode (2G/3G/4G/5G), causing them to attempt connections with the 4G/5G networks of BSNL's roaming partners. Because BSNL currently only has 2G/3G roaming agreements, this leads to failed location updates on the partners' networks and frequent connectivity issues. This has resulted in significant customer dissatisfaction and a high volume of complaints.

Customers are advised to manually set their handsets to 2G/3G mode to ensure connectivity. However, with the global phase-out of 2G/3G networks, particularly in countries like the UK where BSNL's partner 3UK has limited coverage, this solution is not sufficient. The absence of 4G roaming agreements exacerbates these problems, often leaving customers without service or with poor connectivity.

To address these issues, BSNL urgently needs to establish direct 4G roaming agreements with global partners, similar to those maintained by other TSPs. This would facilitate seamless international roaming and significantly improve customer satisfaction by ensuring compatibility with modern network standards. Additionally, implementing international roaming on Wi-Fi (VoWiFi) could greatly enhance the user experience. VoWiFi allows users to make and receive calls over Wi-Fi networks,

providing a reliable alternative to traditional cellular networks, especially in regions where 2G/3G networks have been phased out.

By addressing these technical challenges and implementing these solutions, BSNL can improve its international roaming services, ensuring reliable and seamless connectivity for its customers worldwide.

3. Urgent Need for BSNL to implement eSIM Services to Retain High-ARPU Customers

As of now, BSNL is the only telecom service provider in India that does not offer eSIM services to its customers. This has been a major source of frustration for BSNL customers, as eSIMs offer several advantages over traditional physical SIMs, such as:

- **Convenience:** eSIMs can be activated and deactivated remotely, eliminating the need to visit a store or physically swap out a SIM card.
- **Security:** eSIMs are more secure than physical SIM cards since they cannot be lost or stolen.
- **Sustainability:** eSIMs reduce the need for physical SIM cards, thereby lowering the chances of SIM card faults and reducing waste.

The lack of eSIM support from BSNL is particularly concerning for high-ARPU customers, who are typically more demanding and tech-savvy. These customers own eSIM-compatible devices and are often porting out to different carriers due to the absence of eSIM support from BSNL. Additionally, wearable devices that only support eSIMs are becoming a convenient and versatile option for individuals who want to stay connected without carrying a phone.

To prevent the loss of high-ARPU customers, BSNL needs to establish an eSIM environment immediately.

4. BSNL and Starlink Partnership: Bridging India's Digital Divide with Satellite Internet

BSNL should expeditiously collaborate with M/s Starlink to deliver satellite internet coverage across India. This strategic partnership can significantly address the issue of unreliable internet access among the Indian population, particularly in rural and remote regions. This collaboration will introduce a competitive dynamic against existing players like Jio Satellite Communications and OneWeb.

Starlink's service leverages a constellation of low Earth orbit (LEO) satellites to provide high-speed internet connectivity. This is particularly advantageous in areas where fiber broadband infrastructure is insufficient. The initial deployment reports indicate that users can expect download speeds up to 150 Mbps, with future upgrades potentially increasing this to 300 Mbps. The significance of this initiative lies in its potential to bridge the digital divide in India. By providing essential internet access to underserved communities, it will enhance the overall telecommunications landscape in the country, fostering greater digital inclusion and economic development.

5. Strategic Revaluation of FTTH Operations Essential for BSNL's Sustainability

There are grave concerns regarding BSNL's increasing dependency on FTTH partners. This situation is rapidly becoming unsustainable and threatens the quality and reliability of our services.

We strongly propose that BSNL should at least procure and install OLTEs and limit outsourcing to the last mile fiber installation and maintenance to our FTTH partners. The current over-reliance on FTTH partners is leading to the formation of cartels, and there is a growing concern that they might soon leverage their position to arm-twist BSNL. This issue is not isolated but is prevalent across many BAs/OAs where FTTH partners are forming associations and meeting BA heads and CGMs for pressing their various demands, which should not be encouraged. We need to address partner issues individually, not as associations.

Furthermore, they are reluctant to pay the Rs. 433 monthly infrastructure fee for exchange sites, despite earning substantial commissions. In urban exchanges, this fee is 866 Rs per month. Existing FTTH partners are also blocking new entrants and charging exorbitant fees of 4000-6000 Rs per connection, while private competitors offer similar services at 5000 Rs for 12 months. This practice is causing us to lose market potential and hindering our ability to increase connections.

Apart from the efforts of our BBMs and FTTH partners, critical support is required in the form of marketing activities to increase provision and compete with other strong players in the market. It is disheartening to note that our current marketing activity is virtually non-existent. Without marketing, it is difficult to push our product in the highly competitive market, especially after the penetration by Airtel and Jio Fiber, apart from the existing players in each BA. Our BBMs conduct regular meetings with our partners to improve provisions, but without marketing activities, all the efforts of BBMs go in vain. **Furthermore, the introduction of advance billing for LL to FTTH conversion, where customers have already deposited amounts for LL, has slowed down the conversion. Many converted customers go on DNP after seeing the first bill, which is more than their existing LL bill, leading to a higher number of disconnections.** Additionally, frequent disturbances in the main core OTN links and hanging of main servers are irking customers and FTTH partners, hampering the efforts of BBMs and our growth.

Additional Suggestions to Improve FTTH Connections:

1] Similar to our competitors Jio Air Fiber and Airtel Xtreme Fiber, we need to carry out marketing activities to sustain in the field. Regular paper advertisements (weekly) should be given in leading newspapers.

2] TV ads on leading channels, sports channels during cricket matches, and news channels should come frequently, say every 30 minutes. Our competitors' ads are very attractive during the recent T20 World Cup and on other leading channels.

3] Whenever we open Facebook, Instagram or Twitter, our advertisement should appear after every 5 to 6 messages. Currently, our social marketing is also nonexistent. The official social media handles of BSNL Corporate must be made up to date and vibrant to attract customers and provide seamless customer services to them.

4] We should provide LED signboards to our LCOs and display them in prominent locations. Most of the FSPs have around 50 to 60 connections and are not ready to spend a huge amount on marketing. They are printing pamphlets and notices for distribution to customers.

5] "No Parking" boards, 1800 4444 stickers, and relevant pamphlets can be printed centrally by the circle team and distributed to OAs.

6] Digital marketing needs to be carried out at the corporate/circle level in full swing to support the activities carried out in the field. We receive calls/SMS from other operators for mobile/internet connections; similarly, we need to enable OBD/SMS features to reach our product to everyone.

7] For LL to FTTH conversion, customers with ISD facilities have to pay a deposit amount again to enable ISD facility, which is not correct. Advance billing should not be done for converted customers.

8] Customers need a 24/7 single point of contact – a toll-free number, where all their issues are to be resolved, such as configuration problems, speed issues, billing complaints, and reconnection after delayed payment.

6. Expanding BSNL Air Fiber Service with 5G Spectrum

BSNL can expand its Air Fiber service to offer a wireless alternative similar to FTTH. **By deploying advanced wireless technologies such as LTE or 5G, BSNL can provide high-speed internet through Air Fiber, offering robust Wi-Fi services without relying solely on fiber optic infrastructure.** This expansion will enable BSNL to deliver broadband connectivity in areas where laying fiber is challenging or cost-prohibitive. Wireless broadband setups are less invasive and more flexible compared to fiber installations, appealing to a broader customer base.

This initiative will not only enhance BSNL's service portfolio but also significantly improve its competitiveness in the wireless broadband market, directly challenging Jio's offerings and contributing to a more diversified and resilient telecommunications infrastructure in India.

7. Addressing Network Issues for BSNL Customers Roaming on MTNL Network:

BSNL customers are experiencing significant network issues while roaming on the MTNL network. Upon escalating the issue to the MTNL team, **we were informed that over 80% of their sites are down due to a lack of AMC and hardware, with no immediate solution in sight. The issue is expected to be resolved only after the launch of 4G, which may take some time to complete. This situation is particularly problematic as many MPs and VVIPs with BSNL numbers are unable to get network coverage while roaming in Delhi and Mumbai, leading to severe complaints and tarnishing BSNL's image.** We can add large number of Customers in Delhi NCR and Mumbai suburban areas. We need to hire more and more infra sites in these areas failing which the uniform coverage will be an issue.

For customers roaming in Delhi and NCR, we suggest using Vodafone roaming as an alternative. To activate Vodafone roaming, BSNL customers need to send an activation SMS from their mobile number by texting ACT ROAM to 53333. After SMS activation, they need to manually select Vodafone or MTNL network. **However, this will incur additional costs, and customers are understandably upset about this extra expenditure. Unfortunately, there is no such roaming arrangement with Vodafone available for Mumbai, leading to high ARPU customers porting out due to this issue. We suggest for extending the BSNL-Vodafone roaming agreement to include Mumbai to mitigate this problem immediately.**

8. Ensuring low latency & high download speed for International Websites & servers:

Although BSNL is hiring IPLC ports from Bharti & Tata, we are not able to provide proper download speed to our Internet & ILL customers while accessing & downloading content **from Websites for which servers are located in International Countries outside India.** Therefore, we are lagging behind the private players and are not able to offer the proper download speed in case of International Websites. The same is also applicable for International Video Conferences. **The download speed issues may be checked with the ISPs (along with latencies) from which we are hiring the IPLC ports to ensure that BSNL is at par with them in offering our customer reliable download speed from international servers.**

9. Network related issues and quick Rehabilitation of BAs transmission cable & Core network cable:

The recent increased number of MNPs towards BSNL is a silver lining after the increase of tariff by other private operators. They are moving towards BSNL with the hope that BSNL will be providing satisfactory services to the customers. In order to provide uninterrupted services, we need to concentrate on our network. We firmly believe that more stress on battery and PP, uninterrupted media (both local and long distance), prompt maintenance of network elements will automatically increase uptime of the network leading to increase in revenue. It is well known that transmission and core network OFC is the back bone of BSNL network and the same is not up to the expectation level. **Hence, it is requested to kindly instruct down the line to ensure Quick Rehabilitation of BAs transmission cable & Core network cable where it is badly damaged to ensure smooth and uninterrupted services. Further, Armored Optical Fiber Cable in procurement of all long-distance lines must be made mandatory.**

To achieve the ambitious target of increasing BSNL's market share from 8.5% to 25% within 18 months, it is essential to strengthening core fiber links to provide seamless connectivity to our esteemed customers. Over the past two years, BSNL has issued significant purchase orders for core equipment upgrades, including CUPS BNG Project (Ph I and Ph III, SDN Enable SER Project, MAAN Project, OTN Ph IV Project etc.

These upgrades are planned on existing, life-expired, and high-loss core fiber links. To meet the future demands of 4G, 5G, and the efficient use of the planned Phase IV OTN network, it is crucial to strengthen core fiber links by leasing additional fibers or laying new cable routes. This will ensure robust infrastructure, superior service quality, and support BSNL's growth objectives.

10. Issues related to Bharat Net Project:

The OF cables laid for covering more than 3 lakhs GP on Pan India basis has been handed over to BSNL since June'22. For maintenance of these OF Cables, tender(s) were floated on Pan India basis package wise (08 package on Pan India) but vendors have not done satisfactory work. **Even now, the work being executed is having many issues and the continued neglect by various vendors is leading to the continuous deterioration in network quality.**

The common factors are

1] Substandard material used (tiffin box type closures instead of SJC, OF cable used are not at par with BSNL standards, cables procured locally.

2] Temporary joints are being made.

3] Mostly cable route has become Over Head with low count 4/6 locally purchased cable. Resulting in 24 fiber routes getting converted to 4/6 Fiber which remains prone to repeated faults.

4] Inexperienced man power deployment. Bike FRT (Fault Restoration Team) instead of full FRT with 4-wheeler. They are not able to carry equipment's like splicing machine, OTDR, Power Meter, SJC (Joint Enclosure), Extra cable and PLB on bike.

11. Provisioning of Sufficient vehicles and resources to maintain network:

Due to the ongoing austerity measures, the provision of hired vehicles has been discontinued, along with the withdrawal of OLA business cabs offering discounts. Currently, only a limited number of Radio Cabs are available without discounted rates, and on a cash payment basis. The lack of vehicle facilities in the field is impeding the prompt and efficient restoration of faults, forcing field officers to utilize their own vehicles. **In order to ensure a quick response to emergencies, it is recommended that hired vehicles be reinstated and Radio Cabs (such as OLA) be allocated for sales staff.**

12. Revising the TA/DA rates for staff performing day to day works of Operation & Maintenance:

The staff of BSNL below the rank of DGM is being made to work on year 2002 rates. While the TA/DA rates of DGM and above officers have been revised from time to time, **those below the level of DGM are still working on meager TA/DA rates which infuses certain amount of reluctance in field staff while performing out station and route maintenance works as they had to spend money from their pockets**. This may appear to be an HR issue but it holds greater significance for the daily operation of maintenance works of BSNL and hence needs to be considered on priority.

13. Ensure commercialization of all high commercial value buildings/premises:

We have premises located at most prime locations in the country which has high commercial value and revenue prospects as regard to the rent revenue is concerned. The focus of our land monetization should not lie on buildings and premises which have comparatively lesser commercial prospects and instead **available space at prime locations needs to be commercialized as they are in very high demand for renting out to generate handsome revenue.**

14. Hiring of OPGW Cables from Govt PSU - AEGCL etc due to frequent cuts & failures of BSNL's own long distance underground OFC media due to rapid roadside development works:

The long distance OFC transmission media of BSNL in Assam on account of being laid underground and laid by the roads is susceptible to frequent cuts and failure due to regular roadside development works. The OFC media hired from OIL, which was laid across oil pipelines, was serving as a redundant media in case of failure, but recent surrender of the same in Sep-2023 has disturbed BSNL Telecom Services all over

Assam in general and mostly in Upper Assam. In such a scenario, employees of Assam Circle have suggested that BSNL may hire OPGW (Optical Grounded Wire) dark fibre from reputed State Govt. PSU like AEGCL (Assam Electricity Grid Corporation Limited); OPGW cables are laid along high power transmission lines (220 kv/320 kv) and hence there is no possibility of cut in these cables due to infrastructural development works like NHAI widening, gas/water pipe laying, etc. Other telecom service providers like PGCIL and AIRTEL have themselves hired more than 1000 km OPGW cable each from AEGCL in Assam. Such a redundant and stable media is more important due to rapid rollout of BSNL 4G and FTTH Services which require high bandwidth backhaul capacity.

Above are few issues which were suggested by our members stationed across various parts of the country for conveying to your good self. They have very high hopes and are ready to take over all the challenges which BSNL is facing today. **AIGETOA assures you of our fullest cooperation in addressing these challenges and achieving the set targets. We are committed to working collaboratively towards the revival and growth of BSNL.**

With Regards,

Sd/-
[Ravi Shil Verma]
General Secretary