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How BSNL improving its network to alleviate call drops

In addition to capital spend, the state-driven operator is undertaking drive tests-cum-optimization to overcome network gaps that could improve service quality drastically.

Muntazir Abbas | ETTelecom | Jul 31, 2016, 11.30 PM IST

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NEW

DELHI: State-run Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) is investing around Rs 7,000 crore to install 21,000 new mobile towers to arrest service quality issues and said that it has lowest number of call drops when compared to private sector

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The company is working on a three-fold strategy that includes network expansion in all circles including the North East where call drop ratio is a little higher, conducting drive tests and network optimization as well as infrastructure sharing with private players to further ease network congestion and hence, services.

BSNL is in talks with Vodafone India and Bharti Airtel to formally ink intra-circle roaming (ICR) deals.

"We are in the process of investing Rs 7,000 crore in radio networks, and adding 21,000 new mobile towers across all licensed service areas which itself is a huge capital expenditure to improve services," BSNL chairman Anupam Shrivastava told ET.

The state-owned telco had a mobile consumer market share of 9% of the India's total base of 1,034.25 million subscriptions as of April this year, as per telecom regulator Trai.

The current base transceiver station (BTS) expansion is a part of BSNL's phase 7 + initiative to put additional 21,000 towers, after an addition of 25,000 sites under the phase 7 program, concluded recently, to take the total number to as much as 50,000 including North East.

"Our comprehensive BTS expansion plan that will include locations affected by Left Wing Extremism (LWE), covering North East would take the total count to 50,000 mobile towers by the end of 2016-17 fiscal," the top executive added.

The telco, to mitigate service issues, has renewed its focus on North East with its network expansion program to fill network coverage gaps in the region's bumpy terrain.

In addition to capital spend, the state-driven operator is undertaking drive tests-cum-optimization to overcome network gaps, and according to Shrivastava, this could improve service quality drastically.

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BSNL is also working on a parallel strategy of network sharing with private service providers through intra-circle roaming (ICR) pacts and spectrum sharing.

This, according to BSNL's top executive, helps BSNL to devise network spending strategy on a specific location to improve coverage while the other partner telco would take care of the rest part, thus minimizing overall spend for the two operators.

The telecom PSU has recently entered into ICR arrangements with Aircel 2G, and the Mukesh Ambani's Reliance Jio Infocomm which is yet to make a commercial foray in fourth-generation or 4G services.

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