

19 DEC, 2011, 03:20AM IST, PTI

Telecom Ministry may auction BSNL's BWA spectrum

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NEW DELHI: The telecom ministry is likely to auction one slot of broadband wireless access (BWA) licence spectrum on pan-India basis after getting back airwaves from the state-run BSNL.

The department of telecom (DoT) has given in-principle approval to the BSNL's proposal of surrendering its BWA licence in nine circles, out of the total 22 service areas for which the telecom operator had paid over Rs 8,500 crore last year.

"After taking BWA spectrum from the BSNL, the government will have airwaves on pan-India basis as the department is already having the spectrum in several circles. So, the government will auction it and whatever amount they get, BSNL is likely to get back around 80-90% of what it had paid last year, about 6,700 crore," sources in the know said.

At present in BWA, 20 MHz of spectrum is available but not on pan-India basis. The telecom ministry is already in talks with the finance ministry to undertake auction of the airwaves. According to reports, sale of one block of BWA spectrum could fetch about Rs 13,000 crore, a move that would help the government in meeting the fiscal deficit target Rs 40,000 crore.

The finance ministry had written twice to the DoT to immediately auction wireless broadband spectrum in order raise funds. Last year, auction of 3G and BWA spectrum had earned a whopping 1.06 lakh crore to the government.

The BWA auction was for two slots of 20 MHz each of pan-India spectrum. The government had raised 67,719 crore from 3G spectrum auction, while it got Rs 39,000 crore through BWA auction.

BSNL had registered a loss of over Rs 6,000 crore for 2010-11, mainly due to high staff cost and payments made for acquiring 3G and BWA spectrum.

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