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BSNL inks multiple tower-sharing pacts with pvt telcos viz., Tata, Etisalat DB, Videocon, Airtel, Aircel and R-Comm

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KOLKATA: Loss-making BSNL's bid to ease its financial pangs by unlocking the value of its idle tower assets may finally ring true. The state-owned telco has just inked multiple tower-sharing pacts with Tata Teleservices, Etisalat DB, Videocon Telecom, Bharti Airtel, Aircel and [Reliance Communications](#) and has instructed all circle heads to respond to tower renting re-quests of these companies on a priority basis.

"All circle heads have been told to maximise tower-sharing business opportunities in their respective territories with the likes of Tata Tele, Bharti Airtel, Videocon Telecom, Etisalat, RCom, [Bharti Airtel](#) and Aircel with whom BSNL has inked national level MoUs," said a senior executive privy to the contents of a recent internal BSNL circular issued to all chief general managers (CGMs).

For the moment, BSNL's top deck isn't too keen on spinning off its tower assets into a separate subsidiary. "The proposal has been there for a while and can be considered in future but the BSNL leadership is not convinced about that business model anymore since most telcos that spun off their tower assets into separate subsidiaries have lately put them on the block," said a BSNL director who did not wish to be named. It is well known that both Vodafone Essar and RCom have been trying to sell their tower assets arms.

At present, BSNL has some 60,000-odd telecom towers scattered across the country. Since bulk of these are idle, especially in the Category B & C circles, the BSNL leadership sees a potential revenue opportunity in excess of Rs 1000 crore if the company is able to address the demand.

"Putting up new telecom towers is never easy and I believe there is a huge revenue opportunity for BSNL in renting out its telecom towers. Actual revenue inflows will hinge on how many private telcos require my towers but we are very keen to offer our spareable towers to all leading private mobile companies on mutually agreed terms and conditions," BSNL chair-man & managing director R K Upadhyay told ET.

Under the terms of its tower-sharing MoUs, BSNL will ink service level agreements (SLAs), offering its tower premises, DC power support and antennae fixing slots to the private telcos. Though commercials remain under wraps, BSNL is likely to charge tower rent in the range of Rs 30K-to 35K per month per operator.

A section of BSNL circle heads, however, believe inking tower-sharing pacts may be easier said than done, especially since a sizeable number of BSNL towers assets sit on rented premises. "It will be a huge challenge for BSNL to charge higher rent by sub-letting its rented premises. This has been pointed out to the BSNL leadership team and we are waiting for more clarity on the terms and conditions of the upcoming tower sharing pacts," said a BSNL circle head speaking on condition of anonymity.

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