

Attempts are being made to stall launch of 4G services by BSNL, say unions; seek PM's intervention.

'It's not even six months since the revival package was approved. However, there is already an attempt to scuttle the company's ambitious revival plans,' reads the letter seeking the PM's intervention.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi

The All Unions and Associations of BSNL (AUAB) – the umbrella organization comprising the Trade Unions and Associations of BSNL – has urged PM Narendra Modi to intervene in the procurement process initiated by the state-owned BSNL to obtain the 4G license, saying “vested interests are attempting to scuttle” the process.

As some sections of the media reported that BSNL had flouted the tender norms for 4G license, the unions shot off a joint letter to the PM on Wednesday pleading with him to intervene in the matter.

“It's not even six months since the revival package was approved. However, there is already an attempt to scuttle the company's ambitious revival plans,” reads the letter.

According to the unions, the Central Government had decided to allot 4G spectrum to BSNL last year but the Telecom Equipment and Services Export Promotion Council (TEPC), an

industry body, has complained to the Department of Commerce that “the BSNL’s tendering process has flouted the GOI’s policy of “Make in India”, which is not true, they say.

It is important to recall here that in order to roll out 4G services, BSNL floated a tender on March 23 this year for the supply, deployment, and maintenance of 4G equipments at 50,000 sites, at a cost of around Rs 9,300 crores.

Interestingly, taking the complaints of the TEPC into consideration, Department of Commerce and the Department of Telecommunications has directed the BSNL to rework its tender.

Saying that “complaints raised by the TEPC is nothing but a ploy to stall the 4G equipment procurement and launching of 4G services by BSNL” the unions said, “We are afraid that someone in the industry is using these guidelines and such forums as a tool to scuttle the launching of BSNL’s 4G services”.

Citing instances of the past when BSNL’s plans of expansion were scuttled, unions said, “In the present scenario also certain vested interests are behind the game plan of scuttling BSNL’s procurement of 4G equipments”.

The unions refuted charges that BSNL tender policy flouted “Make in India” guidelines saying:

- BSNL cannot afford to procure sub-standard equipments from inexperienced companies, not having proven technology.
- The Indian players do not have experience in managing large mobile networks, even if they have developed 4G technology. Further, the quality standards of their equipments have not been tested.
- It will be unfair to direct BSNL alone to buy local 4G equipments, which are largely untested, while letting the private players to provide services with equipments supplied by global giants like Nokia, Ericsson, Huawei, Samsung, etc.
- All the private operators such as Reliance Jio, Airtel and Vodafone Idea are procuring their 4G equipments not from any domestic vendor. Why should BSNL alone be compelled to procure substandard equipments, manufactured by inexperienced vendors, in the name of “Make in India” policy.
- Since BSNL is not supported from USO Fund, or funded by the Govt. of India for this project and tender, they do not come under the purview of “Make in India” policy, as per the PMI guidelines.

“The “Make in India” policy should be made uniformly applicable to all the service providers and not selectively to BSNL alone,” argued the unions.

“BSNL will have to pay a heavy price for any more delay on the part of the authorities. Launching of 4G services is the lifeline for BSNL and the first and foremost requirement for BSNL’s revival,” said unions of the BSNL.