

## BSNL Employees Stage Dharna, Demand Immediate Roll Out of 4G Services

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“The revival of BSNL is unimaginable without the rolling out of 4G service. In such a situation, it is a matter of serious concern that all efforts are being made by vested interests to scuttle BSNL’s 4G roll out,” said BSNLEU in a statement.



Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) employees on Friday, June 26, staged a countrywide dharna demanding immediate rolling out of 4G services and implementation of revival package along with other demands. The dharna which was under the banner of BSNL Employees Union (BSNLEU) was organised keeping in mind the directions of health officials in view of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The protesters wore masks and also followed social distancing guidelines. As per the BSNLEU’s decision, only 10 employees participated in the dharna in big cities and five employees in all other places.

Unions and associations in BSNL have been demanding the revival of this public sector telecom service provider for a long time, along with the roll out of 4G services. Following a series of protests and struggle, on October 23, 2019, the central government had announced a Rs. 69,000 crore revival package for BSNL and MTNL. Among other things, the package include allotment of 4G spectrum to BSNL, asset monetisation and extending of sovereign guarantee, to enable BSNL to raise funds from market, by issuing bonds. However, even after the lapse of eight months, except the implementation of VRS, no other assurance contained in the revival package has been implemented. As per this package, 79,000 employees have already been

retrenched under VRS. So, the union demands that, the government should take immediate steps to implement it's assurances given in BSNL's revival package.

"The extreme delay witnessed in the launching of BSNL's 4G service is a matter of serious concern for the employees. BSNL is already lagging behind the private operators by four years in rolling out it's 4G service. The revival of BSNL is unimaginable without rolling out of its 4G service. In such a situation, it is a matter of serious concern that all out efforts are being taken by vested interests to scuttle BSNL's 4G roll out," said BSNLEU in a statement.

According to the BSNLEU, the tender floated by BSNL, to procure 4G equipment, has been put on hold by the government, based on the complaint given by the Telecom Equipment and Services Promotion Council (TEPC). The objection of the TEPC is that, BSNL is violating the "Make in India Policy". It has demanded that foreign companies should be barred from participating in BSNL's tending process, for the procurement of 4G equipment.

"When all the private operators are procuring world class 4G equipment from international vendors, why BSNL alone should be compelled to procure equipment from domestic vendors. The Indian vendors do not have proven 4G technology. Further, they do not have the experience of managing large networks. Hence, compelling BSNL to procure 4G equipment from the Indian vendors is nothing but denial of level playing ground to BSNL, vis-à-vis the private telecom service providers. In BSNLEU's view, the TEPC is nothing but a tool, being used by vested interests, to stall BSNL from procuring 4G equipment," BSNLEU added.

Another issue that has been raised in the dharna was the non-settlement of issues by the BSNL management. According to the union, the management is adopting a totally negative attitude in the settlement of the issues of the employees. Even after 79,000 employees have retired under VRS, the left out 70,000 employees are not getting monthly salaries on time.

"In the month of May 2020, BSNL earned Rs.1,400 crore. The expenditure for payment salary is only Rs. 350 crore per month. Still, the payment of salary for the month of May has not been made, till this statement goes to the press," said P Abhimanyu, general secretary of BSNLEU.

The contract workers in BSNL have not been paid wages for the past one year, as a result of which 12 contract workers have already ended their lives. At the same time, a large scale retrenchment of the contract workers is being done by the management, which will seriously hamper the operation and maintenance of works at the field level. Additionally, various competitive examinations, for the promotion of the Non-Executive employees, have not been held for the past many years.

"The society dues and the LIC premium, deducted from the salary of the employees, have not been remitted to the concerned organisations for the past one year. This has created serious problems to the employees," Abhimanyu added.

The hardship of the employees have further worsened at the time of COVID-19, since they are not getting cashless treatments, as has been assured in the BSNL's Medical Reimbursement Scheme (BSNLMRS). On the other hand, the management is curtailing even the existing medical facilities.