

BSNL association accuses management of 'lack of professionalism' in reviving company

The Sanchar Nigam Executives' Association (SNEA), an officers' association of Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd (BSNL), has accused the management of "lack of professionalism" in revival of the public sector unit. Even though many of BSNL's issues could be resolved without Government intervention, the revival process had not gained momentum.

According to SNEA, there were a lot of missed opportunities for BSNL, including the failure to roll out 4G through the upgradation of existing network without further investment. This had put a question mark on the company's progress even a year after the roll-out of the Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS). BSNL had its 4G network ready by 2018 and was awaiting spectrum allotment.

The Government and management had repeatedly assured the employees that if the VRS was successful, it would lead to the company's revival, SNEA said in a letter to Chairman and Managing Director P K Purwar.

Nearly, 92,000 employees – 78,500 from BSNL and nearly 13,500 from MTNL – had opted for the two State-owned firms' VRS, with January 31, 2020, as the effective date.

SNEA, in the letter, said it was "astonished" to note that even elementary reforms which should have followed the VRS had not taken place in the last one year. "Decision-making" is not happening in BSNL and the management was not serious about implementation of the decisions taken, which had crippled the PSU.

Following a cabinet decision, BSNL was allotted 4G spectrum on October 23, 2019, but the company failed to upgrade the network in the following five months. Later in April 2020, the Government mandated use of 'Made In India' equipment only, which impacted its 4G roll-out plans.

A decision to merge non-territorial circles based on orders issued on January 14, 2020, is yet to be implemented, seriously affecting optical fibre cable maintenance, the letter alleged.

Redeployment of senior officers, executives and the staff has not been completed even after one year, and many potential and profit-making business units had been headless for a long time, SNEA said, adding this was a serious management failure.

A lot of subscribers have surrendered landline and broadband connections, citing poor services. The company has retrenched labourers and small contractors, "seriously" affecting the maintenance of its landline and OFC services.

A vacuum in strategic cadres following the VRS is yet to be filled up, while the management has been "intentionally delaying" payment of salaries of about ₹425 crore on time despite the company raking in revenues of ₹1,400 crore per month.

During the last one year, other than VRS and issuance of a sovereign bond, there had been no significant progress on any other proposals mentioned in the revival package, it said, asking the management to take corrective steps immediately.

Earlier, another union - BSNL Employees Union (BSNLEU) - had stated that the management of the public sector unit had failed in implementing the revival package to restore its financial health and disburse salaries on time.