

BSNL employees seek 4G network sharing with Vodafone Idea as state-run telco loses 2.3 mn users in March.

The latest letter by BSNLEU comes on the back of BSNL losing nearly 2.35 million customers in March 2024, which eroded its subscriber base to 8.8 million. By contrast, its private sector rivals Jio and Airtel added 2.14 million and 1.75 million users, respectively, taking their subscriber base to 469.73 million and 385.76 million subscribers, according to the latest industry data compiled by the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI).



NEW DELHI: An employees' union of Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) has strongly urged the government to allow it to utilise the 4G network of Vodafone Idea (Vi) following the loss of state-run telecom operator's 2.3 million subscribers in March 2024 due to the non-availability of 4G and 5G services. Citing a media report, they said that BSNL lost about 18 million subscribers in the financial year ended March 2024.

In the absence of 4G/5G services, BSNL's subscribers are migrating to Reliance Jio and Bharti Airtel in massive numbers, they added.

"In the present circumstance, wherein BSNL has lost 2.3 million customers in a single month, we once again insist upon the government to take the needful measures immediately to help BSNL to contain the massive exodus of customers," John Verghese, acting general secretary of the BSNL Employees Union (BSNLEU) said in a letter dated May 4, 2024, to union minister of telecom and IT Ashwini Vaishnaw.

"Being the biggest shareholder of Vodafone Idea, we hope that the government of India can very well ensure that this sharing of network is made possible," Verghese said.

ETTelecom has reviewed a copy of the letter. The letter is also addressed to P.K. Mishra, principal secretary to the Prime Minister of India, Neeraj Mittal, secretary, Department of Telecommunications (DoT), and PK Purwar, CMD, BSNL.

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After BSNL, third-ranked Vodafone Idea (Vi) is the only telco that suffered losses, giving away 0.68 million users in March 2024, which consolidated its subscriber base to 219.81 million.

BSNLEU alleged that the Tata Consultancy Services-led consortium, to whom BSNL has placed the purchase order for the supply and commissioning of 4G equipment, is taking an "abnormally long times" for deploying the 4G network.

"It is understood that, the TCS has not even completed the field trial of its 4G equipments. It clearly seems that the TCS is faced with serious technical problems in the commissioning and operationalising of BSNL's 4G networks," it added.

Homegrown telecom gear maker Tejas Networks' management during a post-earnings call recently said it expects to conclude supplying 4G/5G network equipment to BSNL this fiscal as part of a Rs 19,000 crore contract won by parent TCS-led consortium along with ITI Limited in 2023.

The TCS-led consortium includes Tejas Networks and the Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DoT). While the Tata group's IT services arm is the system integrator, Tejas is supplying 4G/5G network equipment and C-DoT is supplying its network core solutions, under the 4G network deal.

August last year, Tejas bagged a Rs 7,492 crore (about \$900 million) contract to supply its latest 4G/5G Radio Access Network (RAN) for state-run BSNL's pan-India network, spanning 100,000 sites.