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## Govt to address telecom stress, revive BSNL, MTNL: Ravi Shankar Prasad

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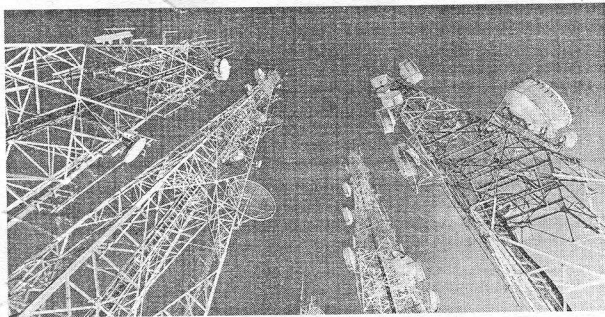
Addressing financial stress in the telecom sector after the upcoming spectrum auction, the revival of Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd (BSNL) and Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd (MTNL) with "least pressure" on the government, and ensuring "fair competition" will be priority for Telecom and IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad.

This is besides establishing India as the manufacturing and export hub of electronics.

The sector has been going through stress for a long time, the minister said, adding that he would meet top telecom companies very soon.

The Union government has set up a panel headed by Telecom Secretary Aruna Sundararajan to look at rationalisation and remove ambiguities in ease of doing business.

The panel will revisit spectrum



usage charges and the report is expected in two weeks.

If the issues require legal clarity, the matter will go to the Solicitor General of India. Attorney General K K Venugopal has appeared for telecom companies in the past.

On MTNL and BSNL, he said: "We will make a focused attempt on the revival of BSNL and MTNL and will

move a Cabinet note on that very soon. The details are being worked out."

He listed three reasons for making these initiatives — they (BSNL and MTNL) are national assets, they operate in strategic areas like home and defence, and in the case of cyclone, flood, or earthquake they are in the forefront of giving free services.

However, the minister asked the

employees of the two debt-laden companies to brace themselves for competition.

"I am urging the employees of BSNL and MTNL to be cooperative and professional, and learn to live in today's competitive world. Our government supports competition because it has brought in cheapest mobile rates and cheapest data in the world.

Therefore, while acknowledging some disruption, we need to acknowledge the benefits that have happened due to competition," he added.

Prasad said, "India has made a mark in electronic manufacturing... I want India to become the export house of electronic manufacturing ... that is something I want to follow in Narendra Modi government II."

He has asked the electronics department, under the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology, to prepare a presentation on the scope and methodology to achieve this goal. The ministry will fol-

low stakeholders' consultations.

"What India offers is extraordinary human resource, technical expertise and a vast market and it is my priority also. In a week I will take a very big presentation on this," Prasad said.

The National Policy on Electronics, approved by the Cabinet in February, asks an "attractive package of incentives for promoting export of electronics goods, thereby empowering the exporters by facilitating global market access".

The policy aims a turnover of \$400 billion by 2025 and to generate 10 million jobs. The government has said manufacturing mobile handsets will be a focus area with a target of 1 billion, valued at \$190 billion, by 2025. This includes 600 million mobile handsets for export.

The government is planning to boost component production to put a curb on growing imports from Asian countries such as China, Vietnam, and Taiwan.