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BSNL to Roll Out ₹4,771-Cr Cable Network for Defence

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State-run Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd will roll out an ₹4,771-crore optic fibre cable network for the army and navy by February next year, according to an internal telecom department note seen by ET.

A 60,000-km optic fibre network is at the heart of the ₹13,334-crore alternate communications backbone that BSNL will build for the army and naval forces over the next two years. Purchase orders for optic fibre cable gear will be placed in two months, the note showed.

In an internal presentation to the telecom department, BSNL has indicated it will also roll out a ₹2,611-crore IP or 'internet protocol' network for the defence ministry by next June. This apart, it will place orders for ₹1,300 crore of transmission systems using DWDM or 'dense wave division multiplexing' technology by next March.

Under an existing pact, airwaves in the 1700-to-2000 MHz band will be equally split between the telecom department and the armed forces. The defence ministry has agreed to vacate a total 150 units of spectrum for commercial use by telecom service providers after BSNL commissions the alternate telecoms network by July 2015.

Telecom secretary MF Farooqui had recently asked BSNL to hasten implementation and conclude all tendering activity by November. This is since the defence ministry had rebuked the telecom department over BSNL's failure to meet timelines in building the alternate communications backbone.

In an April 15 memo to DoT, the defence ministry had complained that while it had already vacated 40 MHz of airwaves back in 2009 for commercial wireless telephony, BSNL had failed to build the alternate communications backbone within 36 months. The project deadline has since been extended to July 2015.

Small wonder, BSNL has given a detailed status report on its rollout plans. In the presentation to DoT, it has indicated it will place purchase orders for encryptors, microwave radios and a satellite network gear by April-May 2014. These are key elements of the defence ministry's telecom backbone and will cost an additional ₹682 crore.