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BSNL exploring ways to improve Internet connectivity in north-eastern States

Looking to tie up with Bangladeshi firms for leasing bandwidth

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State-owned Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd (BSNL) is in the process of firming up plans to put in place an alternative route for improving Internet connectivity in six north-eastern States through Bangladesh.

Compared to the National tele-density average of over 76 per cent, the north-eastern States (Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Tripura, apart from Assam) have approximately 60 per cent tele-density.

The telco is looking to finalise the technical and financial details to lease bandwidth from

Bangladesh telecommunication Ltd - a Bangladeshi telecom operator - and, Bangladesh Submarine Cable Company Ltd, a fibre-optic submarine cable telecom company.

According to an internal note of BSNL, it has "constituted a team" for finalising the proposal with their Bangladeshi counterparts. The team will "soon" be sent to Dhaka.

The route so proposed will be through Chennai to the North Eastern States via Cox's Bazar (Bangladesh). Assam is considered as a separate circle in telecom parlance; hence not included. The proposed optical fibre network, for Agartala-Cox's Ba-

zar-Chennai, will be on submarine (deep sea) cable.

Geographical proximity of Cox's Bazar to these states is one of the reasons. Also important is the location of Bangladesh's only submarine cable landing station at Cox's Bazar (required for laying the optical fibre network).

Bangladesh is connected through the international Internet gateway or SEA-ME-WE 4 (South-East Asia - Middle East - Western Europe 4) cable system.

Connectivity issues

The cable system, developed by 16 telcos globally, links Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Italy, Tunisia, Algeria and France.

The current Internet link in the North-East is the Dharmana-



E-health services being provided in Tripura under a Central Government project. ASHOK CHAKRABARTY

gar (Tripura) - Shillong (Meghalaya) - Kolkata (West Bengal) one that is often affected by natural calamities.

BSNL, apart from Aizwal (Mizoram) and Itanagar (Arunachal Pradesh), has been able to provide Internet connectivity in the North-East through the otherwise circuitous 'chicken's neck

region' route through hiring of "adequate bandwidth" from Power Grid Corporation Ltd.

Cost analysis

According to the internal note, BSNL has suggested that an ILD-Gateway at Agartala, Tripura be set up at an estimated cost of ₹20 crore.

An international long distance (ILD) gateway is a telephone number through which calls are routed to get cheaper rates on international long distance charges, or for making voice over Internet protocol (VOIP) networks. Another ₹13 crore will be spent in augmenting the existing Internet networking of BSNL in the region. Funds, sources said, will be provided by the Centre under the United Service Obligation Fund of India.