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BSNL Likely to Get 2100MHz Band for 4G Services Soon

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New Delhi: Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd (BSNL) expects to get allotment of spectrum soon that will enable it to roll out 4G services and catch up with rivals Reliance Jio Infocomm, Bharti Airtel, Vodafone India and Idea Cellular.

"By next month, 5 MHz in the 2100 MHz band will come across 21 licensed service areas, except for Rajasthan, where we aim to launch 4G services on 800 MHz band radio waves," BSNL Chairman Anupam Shrivastava told ET.

The Telecom Commission, which is the highest decision-making body in the Department of Telecommunications, is expected to grant in-principle approval to state-owned BSNL's proposal for allocation of 4G airwaves at its next meeting, scheduled for May 1.

Although BSNL currently offers third-generation (3G) technology-based services on 2100 MHz band spectrum, it wants to optimally use the airwaves for 4G-based voice and data services.

"Rolling out 4G with an additional five units in the 2100 MHz band can also help in

utilisation of unused spectrum offering contiguity," the telco's top official said, adding that it would be able to offer 2G, 3G and 4G services concurrently.

Telecom minister Manoj Sinha told the Lok Sabha in January that the government was considering BSNL's proposal for allocation of a 5 MHz slot in the 2100 MHz band. BSNL started pilot 4G services in Kerala's Idukki district on this band a month later.

Reliance Jio, Bharti Airtel, Vodafone India and Idea Cellular have already launched 4G services across most of the country.

BSNL's 4G launch—expected at ultra-low rates to woo subscribers—could further intensify competition in a market where Jio's disruptive pricing has already hurt revenue and profit of India's older operators.

The telco plans to upgrade its 109 million mobile subscribers to 4G SIM cards or USIM (Universal Subscriber Identity Module) priced at ₹20.

BSNL had sought airwaves in the 700 MHz band from DoT to roll out 4G services back in September 2016, but that's not likely in the present scenario.