

BSNL sets up unit for overseas foray

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NEW DELHI, April 19: Moving aggressively on its overseas expansion plans, state-run BSNL has set up a separate international business division to explore telecom opportunities abroad.

"We have created an international business unit recently which will look at possibilities abroad ~ be it acquisition of companies or bidding for licences. Mr MK Jain, GM, international business is heading it," a senior BSNL official said.

BSNL chairman Mr Kuldeep Goyal had earlier said the company would look at valuable buyout opportunities based on due diligence of the target company.

The PSU, he said, had already received in-principle board approval to enter the global market and bidding for Tunisia was one such step.

The North African Tunisian country is set to issue new licences for fixed line and basic mobile services. The licences, initially for 15 years, include national and international long-distance services.

BSNL is a late entrant here but is trying to catch up with Indian telecom operators who are looking at Africa for expansion.

Last year, Bharti Airtel and Reliance Communications entered into negotiations with the South Africa-based telecom giant MTN to expand in the African continent, but the talks failed.

Earlier this year, Tata Communications announced plans to expand its operations in Africa through acquisitions, joint ventures, and new projects, and in January increased its stake in South African fixed-line operator Neotel to 56 per cent.

BSNL's sister concern MTNL has already forayed into Nepal and Mauritius. Analysts said BSNL might be exploring the possibilities of bidding for mobile licences in Egypt, Rwanda, Malawi, Turkey and Iran. All these countries will open bids for licence auction within the next couple of months.