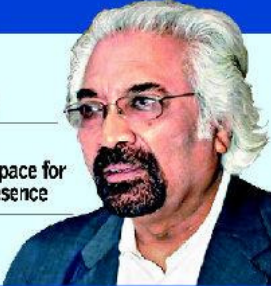


Business Line

Sibal's help sought to speed up national optical fibre project

Thomas K Thomas

Pitroda's five-point plan	
1	100 Mbps bandwidth should be provided for e-governance free of charge
2	Appoint full-time CMD for Bharat Broadband Nigam Ltd
3	ITS officers in surplus pool be appointed as managers in BBNL
4	DoT to request State Governments to give space for block level point of presence
5	Agreement between BBNL and three PSUs with optical fibre cable to be signed



Pitroda proposes measures to put Rs 20,000-cr plan back on track

New Delhi, Dec. 17:

The Advisor to Prime Minister on Public Information Infrastructure and Innovation Sam Pitroda has sought Telecom Minister Kapil Sibal's intervention in sorting out bottlenecks related to rolling out the Rs 20,000-crore National Optical Fibre Network (NOFN) project.

"I remain very concerned about our ability to execute. Several issues require urgent attention and intervention at the highest level as Government is publicly committed to implement NOFN by the end of next year," Pitroda wrote in a letter to Sibal.

New entity

The letter follows a meeting between Pitroda and the implementing agencies last month. The project, which is expected to reach broadband services to rural areas, is being done under a new entity called Bharat Broadband Network Ltd but the laying the optical cable is being carried out by public sector companies which already own some optical fibre cable.

At a recent meeting, Bharat Broadband Nigam Ltd (BBNL) complained that there was no harmony in the tendering and execution process among the public sector companies. Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd, Powergrid and RailTel are supposed to lay the additional cables required to connect all the villages.

The meeting was attended by Nandan Nilekani, Chairman of the Unique Identification Authority of India, and Pitroda. Nilekani, who is also the Co-Chairman of the high-level committee monitoring the cable project, pointed out that none of the major work including field survey and procurement of equipment has been completed.

The Government has set a target for operationalising the project by November next year but going by the current pace of activities the actual work may get delayed by 7-8 months.

Apart from procedural delays, lack of a proper business case is also plaguing the project. During the meeting, BSNL's Chairman said that there were no takers for its broadband connections in rural areas.

The PSU wanted the Government to drive usage by undertaking e-governance projects in a big way.

Action plan

Pitroda has suggested a five-point action plan to bring the project back on track. "We need to get the agreement between BBNL and the three partner central PSUs executed and the work tendered at the earliest," Pitroda said in the letter.

He has added that a full-time Chairman and Managing Director of BBNL should be appointed in addition to other managers to oversee the roll out.

Pitroda has proposed to give the job to officers of the Indian Telecom Service cadre who are already available under surplus pool after they decided against getting absorbed in BSNL.

thomas.thomas@thehindu.co.in

Keywords: [Advisor to Prime Minister on Public Information Infrastructure and Innovation Sam Pitroda](#), [Telecom Minister Kapil Sibal](#), [Nandan Nilekani](#), [Chairman of the Unique Identification Authority of India](#), [broadband connections in rural areas](#)

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