



## BSNL uncertain on deadline for absorption of ITS officers

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The chairman of Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited (BSNL) remained uncertain on Monday on when the state-owned telecom operator would fill the void left by the departure of a bulk of its management.

Last week, BSNL began shifting nearly 1,600 officers from the Indian Telecom Service, who make up most of the senior management, to the Department of Telecom after they failed to choose full-time positions in the company. It is understood that the officials expect better pay from the government.

By Tuesday afternoon, the ailing public-sector utility, which suffered a loss of Rs 5,997 crore in the previous financial year, had relieved 400 officers from their responsibilities.

Rakesh Upadhyay, chairman of BSNL, could not say when the company would resolve the matter, which the Cabinet had twice considered.

He said: "Nobody knows when (the absorption of ITS officers) will finish. But it will finish."

The company will hire retired officials, promote junior executives and seek to recruit from the private sector as it seeks to replace the departing ITS officers. An order circulated within the company last week showed that retired officials would be paid between Rs 13,500 and Rs 30,000 a month. But the details are yet unclear.

Telecom secretary R Chandrashekhar said "all options (were) being looked at" to put BSNL's troubles to rest. He hoped, however, to outline more specific plans "in the next few weeks".

"People will be brought back in a manner that avoids any discontinuity in the business," he said.