

Key note address by the Circle Secretary at the Open Session of the XXIII Circle Conference of SNEA Kerala Circle at Kottayam on 19th Feb 2016.

Respected President, Hon. Member of Parliament, Com. Dr.T.N.Seema, Respected Sri. N.K.Gupta Dir CFA, our beloved GS Com. K. Sebastin, our respected Chairman Com. G.L.Jogi, Com. A.A. Khan, President SNEA CHQ, Respected Sri. L. Anantharam, CGMT Kerala, Respected Sri. George. T. Mathai, GMT Kottayam, Senior Leader Com. P.V Chandrasekharan, leaders from our fraternal organizations, other dignitaries on and off the dais, ladies and gentlemen and my dear Comrades,

I deem it a great privilege and honour to stand on this podium surrounded by stars both on the dais and in the assembly, who in one way or other have contributed their mite to fight and conquer the darkness into which the entire Circle was plunged. The impending doom was finally exiled because darkness cannot conquer light.

Corporatization of the DOT was not wholesomely welcome to this sector. However, ever since the doors of the so-called competition in the name of privatization was opened, here, in the Kerala Circle the BSNL was in a process of evolution and development, taking steps after steps, in its new form to rise to a pre-eminent position in the National space. But dark clouds descended on the Circle around 2013, casting its gloom all around. The industrial harmony, prevalent for years together in the Circle, was thrown to the winds. Unrest and demotivation took over. The flattering parameters of the Circle tumbled down like never before. Now, that the clouds have cleared. We are at the doorsteps of the next stage of evolution.

It is at this precise stage that we have to be on the utmost guard. Simple medication cannot eliminate the calamity that has been already inflicted. Major surgeries or surgeries after surgeries may be required to put the system back on its feet, because so much damage has already been done. The SNEA was the first to believe that the darkness, however strong and thick, could be conquered. And if we saw the light at the end of the tunnel, we also were determined to defeat and conquer the evil forces of darkness which spelt doom all around. The forces of darkness were much stronger and even more treacherous than we initially gauged. And perhaps, that is the reason why we had to take more time to ultimately destroy it. And now it is the time for reconstruction. And the first shot has to be called by the Management. The employees will fall in suit, because it is they that fully know and fervently hope that if chaos is banished and order restored, the process of reconstruction can take place smoothly, hand in hand. They have been breathing the air of this atmosphere and they know the pulse of the place and its people. More than that they have the expertise to build up a system that, if left to itself can go on and on, carrying our Company up the progress ladder steeply and steadily, however difficult the process be.

We hope that the new Administration will give the lead by putting in place a harmonious Human Relations, rather than inhuman animosities. The first step in that direction would be to believe that the employees are humans just as those in the Administration are; to believe that they are greatly enthused and interested to put together a robust Company in the pink of its health and are ready to contribute anything to that cause. We hope that the Management understands. Yes, we believe and we want the consultative dynamics to operate in this Circle so that the damage repair exercise can be smooth and fast. The first and foremost requirement in this direction, we believe is to eliminate the misguided and misleading elements. We have seen a super man being spoilt by sycophancy and misguidance. Men in the Administration never had the courage to call a spade a spade. We do not want to spell out anything more here to elucidate how that man was spoilt. But we may only point out that sycophants do more harm than good, because they have something to gain from pleasing the King. Let me cut short. To be very precise a cordial harmonious working atmosphere or what we call in simple terms- industrial harmony- is the pre-eminent requisite if the damage repair is to be taken up in this Circle.

The new guard, we believe had enough time to settle down; to have an all round glimpse of the essentials. And now is all set to take a fresh shot. We would like to reiterate that we are with all earnest efforts of reconstruction; to put the Circle back on the rails of development, progress and profit. But then we must understand that the Human Resources of this Circle is the most valuable asset. We are sure that wiser counsels will prevail.

It is a well-known fact that the BSNL is currently in a difficult phase, with the paucity of funds to carry out speedy development programs to turn around the Company. However, more often than not, it seldom occurs to the top brass that proper utilization and motivation of the precious man power at hand does not cost a penny. Kerala is still making profits, contributing a revenue of Rs. 2850 crores, which is more than 10 % of the total BSNL revenue and boasts of about 10 percent of the total customer base with nearly 1 cr customers, occupying the top slot not only among the Circles of the country but also among all other operators in the Circle. Unfortunately, as far as the man power at all levels, is concerned, the Circle is lacking and languishing. Two SSAs in the Circle with nearly 3 lakhs and 1.25 lakhs connections, have no GMs to head them while Circles like Chennai TD is flooded with 10 GMs. Last year the Circle earned more than 3.5 cr. from external projects by the Civil/ Electrical wing but does not have a CE Civil /Electrical. We have the unfortunate situation of a single GM heading the functions of Civil, Electrical, Land and Building and HR, while Circles like AP is equipped with 4 CEs. Our strength in the Executive category is less than 50 % of the sanctioned strength, with the working strength of JTOs, standing at a poor 25 %. Still the fact remains that, unlike in other Circles, the CFA sector is still strong enough generating

nearly 50% of the total revenue. This, despite the fact that the Circle is suffering from an acute shortage of man power for development and maintenance activities! It is surprising and understandable that even under these circumstances, executives in are transferred from Kerala Circle to Circles like T.N, CHTD, and KTK and to tenure Circles without any substitute, while the request of more than 100 JTOs are pending from outside Circles to Kerala Circle without consideration. Even under this HR crunch and acute shortage of executives, posting of executives from the Circle to Inspection Circle looks funny enough and requires a revisit. We hope that the BSNL CO will have a look into this uneven distribution of Executives among the various Circles, because with more man power the Circle will be able to perform much better to produce greater revenue and profit.

Unfortunately during the last two years, the Circle Administration woefully failed in properly distributing and utilizing even this scarce staff, available at its disposal in the best interests of the Circle, with egos taking over. The main interest of the Circle Administration was to, somehow, unilaterally, disband the well-thought out and efficiently practiced transfer policy, evolved after much discussions and thoughts, involving all stakeholders in Feb 2008, even before the BSNL transfer policy. The transfer Policy, in vogue in the Circle upto 2013, was in smooth operation meeting the operational requirements of Executives in the shortage areas at the same time meeting the minimum expectations of the transferred Executives to come back to their home SSAs after completion of away service of two years. The new concept that the then Administration had been attempting to float was that the Executives are All India / Circle cadres with a warning that usage of the word home SSA in their requests for transfer would be taken as an offence. Further contention of the Circle Administration was that it was not bound to transfer back Executives transferred in the interest of service after a certain period, even while the BSNL CO is religiously practicing the principle of transfer back of the transferred Executives after two years to their home Circle. The CGMT further stuck to his guns with the new theory that the longest standing persons need not be transferred in the event of long stay transfers. His submission before the court that any among all those who have completed SSA tenure can be transferred and for that reason, long stay is not a criterion, tells his mindset. During the last two years the requests for transfer of executives who have completed more than 2 years' stay in away SSAs have been simply rejected, creating an atmosphere of total frustration among executives, with Executives with more than 4 years' service in away stations yet to get their deserved transfer back. Even the earlier decision, taken to exempt difficult and shortage SSAs/ areas was flouted to the winds with the simple declaration that the whole of Kerala is beautiful and there is no difference between the SSAs. The net effect was total frustration resulting in several court cases apart from throwing a spanner or more into the well-oiled healthy working environment in the Circle. ' I am the boss- you simply obey' attitude of any Administration belongs to the feudal days and will only be

counter-productive in the present context, particularly the Kerala context. Totally ignoring their minimum legitimate expectations is not the best way to derive maximum output from the employees.

Extracting the best from the staff, especially at this crucial juncture of financial and HR crunch may be the best policy. This was actually being practiced in the Circle till recently. Considering the sizable revenue from the CFA sector and acute shortage of WLL instruments, Kerala circle used to provide mobile connections with STV 300 to line staff even before the Corporate Office orders. Similarly the Executives were provided with Data facility for assisting and improving their marketing and service efficiency. The executives were also provided with residential service connections away from headquarters considering the geographical situation of the State and improved transport facility. It has been the experience in the Circle that such motivating acts, though minimal, only improved the efficiency of the staff consequently telling at a substantial increase in the revenue and profit year after year. But the ex-CGMT withdrew all these minor benefits, if they can be called benefits at all, to the employees, ignoring the fact that this was a win-win situation considering the consequent improvement in service efficiency. He considered it useful to restrict retirement meetings only to the evening of the last day in office and discontinuing the brief case supplied as a memento since the last several years. The insult that was being meted out to the employees, after putting in more than 40 years of youth to the cause of the Department/BSNL was a below the belt act and too hard to bear.

The divisions, subdivisions, T M sections, all were decided merely on the arithmetic of landlines alone, without considering any of the field realities. The so-called 'rationalisation policy' applied for this arithmetic was totally ignorant of the business potential, geographical terrain, local availability of man power and all other crucial factors contributing to the revenue and efficiency of the system. The most revenue earning commercial centre like Ernakulam and the Circle and State Headquarters Trivandrum all stood on par with other places based on the arithmetic of 'rationalisation'. Meetings, reports, statistics and wasteful programs like DCRMS reduced the Executives to mere data entry operators finding no time for field activities or improving the service quality and delivery.

The result of all such reforms and more of it was a drastic drop in landlines steeply climbing down to 24 lakhs in 31/03/2015 from 29 lakhs in 31/03/2013. Broad Band, a major revenue contributor to the Circle finances, which was always on an upward rise each year, found itself dropping to negative. The MNP port in port out ratio, the pride of Circle steeply climbed down from a robust 4 to a mere 2. Any increase in revenue

was merely due to the tariff revision and launch of new services like 3G, WiMAX, FTTH etc. The profit growth, also, sadly reduced from 100% to 20 % from 2013 to 2015.

The availability of labour for the operation of service was always a major concern for the Circle. We were able to put in place a policy for supply of labour through contractor. But the low wages for the labourer always stood in the way of its smooth execution. While the market labour rate was as high or more than Rs. 650, the workers were paid less than Rs 350. Their request for a reasonable increase was turned down with the Circle Management which not even prepared for a discussion on the issue little knowing the bearing on the service quality. But now we know that the BSNL CO is fully seized of and involved in the process. We cannot hide our gratitude to our Respected Dir. CFA, Sri N K Gupta, who himself had come down to Kerala Circle on a mission to end the prevailing crisis including the wage issue of the labourers. The decision taken on 20th August 2015 under his Chairmanship on the vindictive actions and increase in wages of labourers are yet to materialize . But we believe that we are on the right track. We are also thankful that the present CGMT Sri. L. Anantharam, has consented to proceed with the required steps to withdraw all vindictive actions, increase wages of workers by categorization and restore the Circle Transfer Policy among other things. These were some actions that we are waiting for and now that it is forthcoming we see the prospects of the Circle looking up. The suggestions from the staff side, which was eliminated for some time now, for marketing and operations will play a significant role for improving the efficiency and revenue of the Circle. We fully acknowledge with thanks that the Corporate Office, being seized upon the problems of the Circle, has been positively and devotedly working out corrective measures.

We are all talking about a total damage repair or disaster management for the Kerala Circle. I would like to call the attention of the Management at the Corporate and the Circle levels on some of our basic needs, if the look up for which we are all aspiring for has to be really effective. The last few years have gone by without any attention on these issues, because the pre-occupation of the Management was on the other fronts contributing to negative growth.

Kerala circle has the highest number of land line connections, to be precise 23,70,733 , whereas the next in line is AP with 14,29,635 DELs, though AP has more than double the population of Kerala. Here again there is a stand out specialty for Kerala with more than 2/3 rd of the DELs working in the rural areas. Therefore it is only natural that the store requirement will be much more for effective and purposeful maintenance. Kerala Circle, as stated earlier, is contributing more than 10% of the total revenue of BSNL and it is the only Circle generating profit consistently after becoming a PSU. This year we are targeting an ambitious 3000 Cr revenue. At present, we have the potential for

providing more than 1.5 lakhs land line and broad band connections in a year. And this calls for a minimum supply of 10,000Km of 5 pair cable and 10,000km of drop wire. For the maintenance of these 25 lakhs land lines, another 5000 km of 5pr cable and 15,000km of drop wire is required. But the allotment in 5 pr cable happens to be less than 2000km and drop wire less than 8000 km, against a projected requirement of 25000 km. Shortage of these items will definitely have a telling effect on the quality of service, apart from jeopardizing our development ambitions. This year itself the Kerala Circle has, so far, provided more than 66990 NPCs and 1, 22,620 BB connections. The Circle has projected a requirement of 2000km of OF Cable against which only 100 km is allotted. This, needless to say, is mere pittance. The BSNL CO and the Dir CFA will kindly take care so that our hopes of reconstruction are not shattered.

In the mobile sector with 70 Lakhs connections, we are at the number 2 slot in the Circle. Our race for the top position is severely hampered by the non-modernization of the outdated switches. The Nortel switches are to be fully replaced and more 3G BTSs installed to equip the Circle to be in the race with other operators, who go in for modernizations at the very thought of it. We cannot win the race with the heavy shackles on our feet. More equipments, commensurate with the needs of the times, is , therefore a must pre-requisite. On the maintenance front, nearly 2000 of BTSs are lacking any battery backup which is a main blot on the quality of service. With all these constraints, we have been able to add 10,97,000 mobile connections this year. As regards MNP our port in was 4 times that of the port out, which is a direct reflection of the efficiency we have been able to maintain, despite the severe constraints. The acceptance and affection of the public for BSNL services also helps us put our chins up. BSNL Kerala has the highest port in among all the operators in the Circle. The exemplary Mobile BSS maintenance, a role model for the entire BSNL was ruthlessly dismantled in spite of orders from the Corporate Office to the contrary, in the name of ERP implementation. We hope for a revisit on the issue.

In spite of the huge demand for leased circuits, we are unable to meet the requirement for want of necessary modems, transmission equipment and areal OF cables. We are at present haplessly placed for want of necessary materials and equipment. We hope that our pleas will fall on the listening ears of the concerned in the corporate Office, so that this high revenue sector can be much more involved as a potential revenue source.

The list can go on and on. But I do not consider this forum as the right place to project all and only our needs and wants. We would like to tell the Management that, as we have pointed out in the initial paragraphs, what we require is a fast- paced and complete damage repair. We feel that the right seeds have been sown. You can expect only good harvest from the good seeds. Let us continue to sow only the goods seeds, carefully weeding out any weeds that may appear. From our side, we will, as always reciprocate to all the gestures from the Management. Our only hope and prayer is that, as in the

past, we would like to share substantially with our contributions to the growth and development of BSNL, always remembering that we have a precious duty to the customer, who is instrumental for the growth and the profits. The successful implementation of the program chalked out for better customer care and growth of service by all Unions/ Associations in co-ordination with management namely Service With A Smile (SWAS) has to be our top most priority in our agenda in this direction. Let no one entertain the foolhardy hope that everything will come by the wave of the magic wand. It is a consultative process that contributes and has contributed to the several laurels that the Circle can boast of. Let us commit together to a glorious win for the Kerala Circle, forgetting all the suffering and injuries, to which we feel, the present Management is prepared to apply the healing balm. My colleagues and Comrades have proved time and again that they are equal to any task. They will happily involve themselves with all the heart in this ambitious process of reconstruction. And the ultimate winner shall be our bread winner, the BSNL. And may I conclude with a quote from Paulo Coelho's Alchemist '**if you have genuine dream, a genuine desire, the whole universe will conspire in your favour to achieve it**'. Let us end this address with a genuine dream, a genuine desire for the prosperity of BSNL.

George Varghese,

Circle Secretary, SNEA

Kerala Circle at Kottayam.

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