

## **CBI noose dangles over Raja's head**

### **J Gopikrishnan | New Delhi**

The Central Vigilance Commission's order for a CBI probe into the controversial 2G spectrum allocation is going to hit the Prime Minister's "honoured colleague" and Telecom Minister A Raja.

The in-house investigation by the CVC had pinpointed "malafide motives and blatant corruption" by Raja's own men — former Telecom Secretary Siddharth Behura, former Private Secretary RK Chandolia (currently Economic Adviser to DoT) and DDG of Access Service AK Srivastava — in the dubious spectrum allocation, resulting in a loss of more than Rs 60,000 crore to the public exchequer, said sources.

The CVC's move has put the UPA Government in a fix. According to highly placed sources in CVC and Department of Telecom (DoT), the CBI will quiz the "tainted officials", and file an FIR. The CVC order came just five days before the crucial hearing in spectrum cases on October 20 in the Delhi High Court.

According to sources, the CVC has already taken possession of the incriminating files containing notings by Raja, "ordering allocation of spectrum" on dubious first-come-first-serve basis at throwaway prices to new entrants in telecom sector.

"The CVC has taken note of the manipulation of TRAI's recommendations by the DoT and also the fact that former Telecom Secretary DS Mathur's objections were overruled by his successor Behura in allotting telecom licences to real estate companies," said a Vigilance official.

Behura was handpicked by Raja on January 1, 2008, after Mathur retired. He also worked with Raja during his tenure in the Ministry of Environment and Forests. Within a few days of becoming the Telecom Secretary, Behura issued the controversial order of reversing the cut-off date of spectrum licence application.

October 1, 2007 was first declared as the cut-off date. But in the first week of January 2008, the DoT changed the cut-off date to September 25, 2007.

This decision was quashed by the Delhi High Court in June 2009. The DoT's application for the stay was not allowed by the court. Behura retired on September 30 this year.

The very next day Raja appointed him as Chairman of Chennai-based C-DoT Alcatel Research Centre.

CVC officials also disclosed that they had also taken possession of notings on files by Raja's then Private Secretary Chandolia, who is currently rehabilitated as Economic Adviser to the DoT.

Earlier in April, the Central Vigilance Commissioner Pratyush Sinha had come out openly against irregularity in the Telecom Ministry's spectrum allocation and said he would soon "fix responsibility" for the scam.

Despite Sinha's indictment, the Prime Minister chose to accommodate Raja in his second tenure by retaining him in the same Ministry.

Within 24 hours of Raja's second entry in Telecom, Delhi High Court slammed the spectrum allocation and observed that "spectrum was sold like cinema tickets".

### **Spectrum Scam:**

DoT gives licences without Cabinet approving the first-come-first-served condition

Licences were granted in 2008 at a rate fixed in 2001

The cut-off date was dubiously revised from October 1 to September 25

Real estate companies like Swan and Unitech are the major beneficiaries

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Swan got licence for Rs 1,537 cr and within weeks offloaded 45 per cent of its shares to UAE-based Etisalat for Rs 4,500 cr

Unitech got licence for Rs 1,650 cr. Within weeks, it also offloaded 60 per cent of shares to Norwegian Telenor for Rs 6,200 cr. As Telenor is operating in Pakistan and Bangladesh, the Home Ministry raised objections

Raja had arm-twisted BSNL to enter into an unprecedented Intra-Circle Roaming Agreement with Swan. This was done just a few days before the Etisalat deal. This deal with BSNL helped Swan to boost its share price

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