

NAB intervenes in PTA 3G auction crisis

Bold directors of Authority
provide info, seek protection

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ISLAMABAD: The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has intervened in the scandalous hiring of consultants by the government for the US\$ 1-2 billion auction of 3G spectrum by the government after two of the three members of the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) refused to become part of the process adopted by the government.

Sources in the NAB told The News that PTA, Pakistan Competition Commission, Pakistan Procurement Regulatory Authority (PPRA), and Ministry of Information Technology are being approached by the Bureau to probe the matter and to ascertain if PPRA's approval was sought in the hiring of the consultants.

A NAB source claimed that one of the two PTA Members-Member Technical Dr Khawar Siddique Khokhar, who on Mon-

day had resisted the government's pressure to approve the project's controversial proposed auction plan, has also formally approached the NAB complaining about the pressures he was facing to approve the auction plan of the project.

The member, it is said, has also informed the NAB and the Supreme Court of Pakistan about his fears for his own personal and family security keeping in view the monetary stakes involved in one of the major auctions in the country's history. Copy of the same complaint has also been sent to the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

The NAB has also been provided with the documents including letters of PPRA and NAB, earlier issued to PTA in regard to the appointment of consultants, suggesting that the appointments of the foreign consultants is in blatant

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violation of the Pakistan Telecommunication (Re-organization) Act, 1996, the PPRA Rules and instructions of the National Accountability Bureau conveyed to the PTA by NAB regarding keeping NAB on board during this entire process including the hiring of consultants.

The NAB was also told that in a high level meeting held on Monday at the Prime Minister House, which was chaired by the prime minister of Pakistan, same concerns were raised by Dr Khokhar and it was insisted that this entire process be carried out in accordance with the Pakistan Telecommunication (Re-organization) Act, 1996, the PPRA Rules and instructions of the National Accountability Bureau to ensure transparency, credibility and compliance with law in letter and spirit.

However, the NAB has been informed that the high level meeting wanted one way or the other approval of the 'Informa-

tion Memorandum' which had been prepared by the consultants.

Khokhar told NAB that all sorts of pressure was exerted on him to immediately approve the Information Memorandum but he made it clear that since he had not been involved in this process for the last two months and keeping in view the volume and intricacies of the matter, he would need at least ten days to review the Information Memorandum and give his comments on the same.

The NAB source while quoting Dr Khokhar's letter said that he complained that he was conveyed extreme displeasure and annoyance for not adhering to the desires of those present in the meeting.

Dr Khokhar said that all these decisions fall within the exclusive domain of the powers and functions of the Authority as per provisions of the Pakistan Telecommunication (Re-organization) Act, 1996.

The Authority being an au-

tonomous, independent regulator should be allowed to perform its functions and exercise its powers in accordance with law without interference of the Ministry of Information Technology and/or the prime minister.

The domain of the Ministry of Information Technology at best is to make policies but direct interference into modalities and exercise of functions and powers of the Authority constitutes a blatantly obvious regulatory capture, he added.

The Member Technical also referred to the Superior Court's decision that no officer should follow illegal orders of their superior, and insisted that he has acted merely in accordance with law.

In these circumstances and considering the monetary stakes involved, Dr Khokhar told the NAB that he fears for his own personal and family security, adding that some unfair and unqualified actions against the undersigned and his family are also extremely likely to be initiated in the near future.