

Scam stink as DD to hire DTH it could have bought

By **Yatish Yadav** in New Delhi

AFTER the disgraceful exit of former Prasar Bharati CEO B.S. Lalli over hiring of equipment during the Commonwealth Games (CWG), another outsourcing scam appears to be brewing in the corridors of Mandi House.

The Prasar Bharati board, under its officiating CEO Rajiv Takru, has allegedly pushed through a proposal that violates a decision of the Union cabinet on the expansion plan for Doordarshan's direct-to-home (DTH) service.

The 11-member Prasar Bharati board gave a go-ahead to the proposal on May 13 this year to outsource the entire operation to private players despite the government allocating funds for the purchase and maintenance of equipment and staff salary.

■ **Rajiv Takru faces allegations of approving several financial proposals without following due diligence**

■ **Prasar Bharati has run down cabinet proposal to expand own DTH facility**

■ **Violating norms, Prasar Bharati board is all set to pay exorbitant sums to private players for hiring equipment**

■ **Empowered committee on finance with six part-time members taking all decisions in violation of Prasar Bharati Act**

■ **Board recommends hiring camcorders worth ₹58 crore without inviting tender, a violation of CVC guidelines**

In August 2010, the central government had approved the expansion plan of the existing DTH facility available on DD Plus by increasing the number of channels offered in the bouquet from 59 to 97.

For this purpose, it had approved ₹75.43 crore under the 11th Plan. Out of this allocation, ₹44.96 crore was earmarked for enhancing the DTH platform, including procurement of equipment, and ₹3.47 crore was meant for maintenance costs and staff salary.

The government communicated its decision to Prasar Bharati on August 17, 2010, that the work implementation progress report should be furnished on a monthly basis to the information & broadcasting (I&B) ministry, which would forward it to the cabinet secretariat.

In a letter to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and I&B minister Ambika Soni, the National Federation of Akashvani and Doordarshan Employees (NFADE) has questioned Takru's motive to push the scandalous decision through the board. "We really fail to understand that when all the equipment can be procured as a one-time capital investment of about 100 crore... why is the officiating

**MAIL TODAY
EXCLUSIVE**

CEO of Prasar Bharati board insisting on paying huge amounts as rent to our rival companies for operating the system from our own office complex with all facilities," NFADE chairman Anilkumar S. wrote in the letter.

Takru conceded Prasar Bharati was not utilising the scheme's funds for creating DD's own enhanced DTH infrastructure. He, however, said the scheme fund would be utilised for some other project and the government had been intimidated about it.

"Since no procurement is happening in Prasar Bharati because of certain reasons, the board had unanimously decided to hire the DTH facility from private players to avoid delay. We will generate money to pay the hiring cost for DTH services. The government and the cabinet have been intimidated about it," the officiating CEO said.

Takru, on the contrary, claimed that some people with vested interest were opposing this move since hiring will be transparent and there will be no scope of wrongdoing. He also said that procurement by Prasar Bharati had been minimal this year.

A senior official of the ministry said Takru had recommended floating a tender for outsourcing the DTH services to private players. It has already been prepared and vetted by the legal department, he added.

"Hiring of such facilities will cost the government approximately ₹200 crore in the next five years, which is much more than

the investment needed to own the infrastructure. So, every year Prasar Bharati will spend crores of taxpayers' money on rent," the official added.

Takru, however, said such figures were without any basis as they had not finalised the deal with any party as of now.

Sunil Kapur, one of the members of the empowered committee, said he had refused to sign any proposal in the only meeting he attended so far. Kapur could not recall when the meeting took place or the panel's agenda.

"For the last six months, I have not been able to attend any meeting because of my ill

ties were shunted out of Delhi in September. Some of them were even transferred before they completed their fixed tenure. Anil Kumar S., engineering assistant and chairman of the National

One sent to Shillong and another packed to Kargil

Federation of Akashvani and Doordarshan Employees, was transferred to Rewa in MP. Umesh Chandra, another office-bearer of the union, was trans-

ferred to Kargil. Kulbhushan Bhatia, secretary general of the association, was transferred to Kota while vice-chairman Sanjay Kumar was packed to Shillong as punishment posting.

Takru said they were transferred for overstaying at one place for more than a decade. "They were not transferred for raising the DTH issue but because the association interfered in the management's functioning. They had all been threatening the management because of the clout the employees' union used to enjoy."

Mail Today Bureau



BROADCASTING CONTROVERSIES: The national broadcaster's woes are piling on one after the other.



CEO WHO PUSHED FOR IT

RAJIV Takru, a 1979-batch IAS officer of the Gujarat cadre, hails from Uttar Pradesh and is currently on central deputation to Prasar Bharati as the officiating CEO. Takru joined the ministry of information & broadcasting as additional secretary in October 2010, and was nominated as the officiating CEO of Prasar Bharati after B.S. Lalli was suspended over corruption charges in January 2011. Before joining the ministry, Takru was serving as director-general of the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT) under the ministry of textiles.

Whistleblowers shunted out to outposts

PRASAR Bharati board member (personnel) Shiv Kumar was asked to vacate his official residence the day his tenure ended on October 28 this year. Officially, he could have stayed there till December 2011. But he had to vacate his house on the midnight of his last day in office. But Prasar Bharati officiating CEO Rajiv Takru clarified the order to vacate his official residence came from the finance ministry.

Doordarshan and All India Radio employees who opposed the decision of hiring equipment for the DTH facility and outsourcing work to private par-

health. I'm aware of certain controversies surrounding the empowered committee but since I'm not attending any meeting these days, I would not be able to say much on the DTH issue," Kapur said.

In the past, a similar decision taken by former CEO Lalli to outsource and hire equipment caused huge losses to the exchequer. Lalli was indicted by the Shunglu committee, established to probe the CWG mess, for this move and he is also facing a CBI probe.

In other irregularities, the board had also approved and recommended procurement of HD camcorders on the basis of

propriety article certificate (PAC) — a technical term used to pre-decide a particular brand — from Sun broadcast equipment at a cost of ₹58 crore without calling for tenders. The decision was taken violating financial rules of the board, which states that high-value purchases should be done through the tender process, avoiding the PAC route. The Central Vigilance Commission is also against purchases done without inviting bid.

Sources said the I&B minister was apprised of the arbitrary decisions and she is said to be contemplating action.

yatish.yadav@mailtoday.in