

4G service licensing issue under CIAA scanner

The Commission for the Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) is set to begin a probe on the issuance of 4G (fourth generation) service licences to different domestic telecom companies in recent times.

The anti-graft body is mulling to initiate the probe after a few complaints were registered at CIAA alleging huge corruption in related government agencies while issuing licences for 4G telecom service, also called 'Long Term Evolution (LTE)' service, to different telecom companies.

"Complaints have been registered alleging financial irregularities while issuing 4G licence to telecom companies. Similarly, the registered complaints also state that 4G launch in the country was untimely and the government should have directly launched 5G in the backdrop of different countries preparing to introduce the next generation telecom service," informed Padma Prasad Pandey, spokesperson for CIAA, adding that the commission will soon start investigation over the allegations and look into the entire process of 4G launch and 4G licence issuance to telecom companies.

Nepal Telecommunications Authority (NTA) — the telecom sector regulator of the country — had first issued the 4G service licence to state-owned Nepal Telecom (NT) in October 2016. Subsequently, NT had rolled out 4G telecom service from January 1 last year.

Private telecom giant Ncell was the second company to get the 4G licence from the government. NTA had granted the 4G service licence to Ncell in the first week of May in 2017, when Ncell was facing controversy and criticism on tax clearance issue. The firm had launched its 4G service from the end of the same month.

Likewise, the government also gave the 4G service licence to Smart Telecom in May 2017, though the number of subscribers of Smart Telecom is quite low. The company had formally launched its 4G service from October 28.

While the probe report of CIAA shall determine whether or not there was corruption in the process of issuing 4G service licence to telecom companies, NTA officials refused to comment on this matter.

Responding to the second charge that the government should have waited and rolled out 5G instead of 4G, NTA Spokesperson Min Prasad Aryal said, "The jump from 3G to 5G in Nepal is not contextual as this telecom service is yet to be launched commercially in the global telecom market."

Source: The Himalayan Times, 21st February 2018