

HC pulls up govt over licence issue

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NEW DELHI: The Delhi High Court on Monday pulled up the government for its decision to advance the cut-off date for allotment of telecom licences to new operators in January 2008 on a first-come, first-serve basis.

A division bench headed by Chief Justice A P Shah asked Attorney General Goolam E Vahanvati the reasons for which the department of telecom advanced the cut-off date to September 25, 2007, from October 1, 2007.

“If you had already fixed a cut-off date (of October 1, 2007), then there would be a legitimate expectation ... What made the government to change after receiving 189 applications by that date,” asked the bench.

The attorney general said that it was done to handle the large number of applicants and non-availability of spectrum.

The Court, in turn, asked: “whether a decision was taken without going through the applications, and whether many applications were invalid and improper. If so, how many were invalid.”

It said sectoral regulator TRAI had said that there would be no cap on the number of service providers, but DoT’s action tantamount to limit the number of players.

The bench also asked the rationale behind setting September 25 as the cut-off date and why not some other date.