

Race for TRAI top job heats up

4 Apr 2009, 0311 hrs IST, Kalyan Parbat, ET Bureau

KOLKATA: The race for the top job at Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai) is donning new shades. The high-powered search committee, it is learnt, is likely to interview ex-DoT secretary J. S. Sharma on April 9 as the latest contender for the Trai chairman's post, a top DoT official told ET.

At present, Mr Sharma is a member of TDSAT, the appellate tribunal for telecom disputes. His entry in the race is significant as it comes in the backdrop of TDSAT's scathing criticism on Trai's decision not to impose a cap on the number of service providers per circle at a time when there is an acute spectrum crunch. What's more, the TDSAT hasn't even taken too kindly to Trai's modification of the subscriber-linked criteria for additional spectrum allocation.

With Nripendra Misra checking out last month, the future Trai chairman will need to go about a host of unfinished telecom regulation. Perhaps the most challenging one will be coming up with transparent spectrum management norms. Not to mention regulation for 3G networks and pricing of 3G spectrum.

Significantly, Mr Sharma's entry into the race has also surprised telecom industry circles. Especially, since the apex search panel has already shortlisted four contenders -- finance secretary Arun Ramanathan, consumer affairs secretary Yashwant Bhave, member (technology) in the Telecom Commission K Sridhara and former finance director of BSNL S.D Saxena -- for the post of Trai chairman.

Interestingly, Mr Sharma's name did not figure in the original list of 13 candidates who were found competent for the Trai top slot out of some 26-odd applications received by the screening committee.

But with the model code of conduct coming into force in the run-up to the 2009 general elections, the government will need to get the go-ahead from the Chief Election Commission, especially since zeroing in on the telecoms and broadcast industry regulator happens to be one of the most high profile appointments by the government.

After Mr Misra retired on March 22, Trai member AK Sawhney has been officiating as the interim chairman.