

CBI files chargesheet against Reliance Infocomm officials

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CHENNAI: The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has filed a chargesheet against top officials of Reliance Infocomm over illegal re-routing of international calls as local calls.

The chargesheet was filed in the court of the additional chief metropolitan magistrate, Egmore, Chennai, on June 28, a top CBI official told ET.

The charges pertain to the time when Reliance Infocomm was part of the Mukesh Ambani group of companies. Infocomm, called Reliance Communications, is now a part of the Anil Ambani group of companies. A penalty of Rs 350 crore was levied against the telecom company four years ago for this offence.

It is learnt from a government official with direct knowledge of the development that the officials named in the chargesheet include Manoj Modi, Pankaj Pawar, Akhil Gupta, Shankar Adwal, K Raja and Bhagwan Das Khurana. Mr Gupta, a senior executive of Infocomm, is now the head of private equity fund Blackstone. Mr Modi is still with Reliance Industries.

Reliance Infocomm was floated by Mukesh Ambani to launch mobile wireless services across the country. It was a part of the Reliance Industries group of companies. When the Ambani brothers split the family business in 2005, Infocomm, along with affiliates and subsidiaries, was given to Anil Ambani. Infocomm has subsequently been renamed as Reliance Communications.

Agency reports said that CBI filed the chargesheet under 120-B (criminal conspiracy), 20-A (breach of licence), 21 (unauthorised telegraph) and 25-C (intentionally damaging or tampering with telegraphs) of the Indian Telegraph Act.

Besides, Sections 65 (tampering with computer source documents), 66 (hacking with computer system), 85 (contravention of any of the provisions) of the Information Technology Act.

The case relates to manipulation and tampering of calling lines identification of ISD calls by Reliance Infocomm, passing off international calls as local ones and causing loss to the government and its PSUs, BSNL and MTNL, worth several crores of rupees.

According to the CBI, the company would mask incoming international calls as local ones through one of the three gateways, Chennai, Kolkata and Mumbai. The calls would be put on the Public System Telephone Network as local. This was done, CBI sources said, with the help of specially-designed software and accomplices in BSNL.

This was allegedly done to avoid paying Access Deficit Charges (ADC) to PSU, BSNL. Private telecom operators have to pay the state-owned telecom behemoth Rs 4 on every incoming international call as ADC. When contacted, a RIL spokesperson said: “We are not aware of any such development.”