

## '2G scam in NE, ₹11 lakh towers to cost ₹80 lakh'

**New Delhi:** Supreme Court on Monday sought responses from the Centre and BSNL on NGO Telecom Watchdog's petition alleging a scam in the decision to deploy outdated 2G services in Arunachal Pradesh and two Assam districts at eight times the actual cost.

Justices Madan B Lokur and Deepak Gupta issued notices to the telecom department and BSNL after petitioner's advocate Prashant Bhushan said money collected from auction of cancelled 2G spectrum licences were being misused and the government was deviating from its 'Digital North East 2022' policy.

He said though the 2G cell phone tower costs Rs 11 lakh, the contract was awarded by BSNL to private parties at Rs 80 lakh per tower.

The petitioner sought quashing of the January 16, 2018, agreement between DoT and BSNL, which mandated use of outdated 2G technology purchased at a

cost of Rs 2,258 crore from two private companies "with mala fide intention". In the alternative, it sought amending of the agreement to include 4G services for Arunachal Pradesh besides Assam's Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao districts.

The writ petition by Telecom Watchdog was earlier dismissed by the Delhi high court. In its appeal against the HC

### SC SEEKS RESPONSE

order before the SC, the petitioner said as per the Indian Telegraphy Act, the government is obliged to provide all types of telegraphy services at affordable rates to the rural and unconnected areas. For this, a separate Universal Service Obligation (USO) Fund is in operation since 2002, which as on June 30, 2018, had Rs 48,393 crore of unspent amount. It cautioned against its use for deployment of outdated technology. TNN