

Fight over Mexican telecom frequencies turns ugly

August 23 2012, by E. EDUARDO CASTILLO

(AP) — A dispute over control of hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of wireless frequencies has erupted into an ugly, personal feud between Mexico's government and one of its most influential media companies.

The head of broadcaster MVS Communications and some of the top officials in President Felipe Calderon's administration accused each other Wednesday of lying about the government's reason for withdrawing MVS's right to frequencies in a bandwidth used by the newest generation of mobile devices.

MVS charged that it was being punished for one of its show's discussions of an allegation that President Felipe Calderon is an alcoholic. The government said MVS was making false charges in an effort to pressure authorities to reverse a regulatory decision that went against the company.

The dueling news conferences were the culmination of more than a week of escalating and increasingly bitter charges traded among some of Mexico's most powerful people in the closing months of Calderon's six-year term. It's been a remarkably public display of enmity inside the upper ranks of the country's economic and political elite, which often prefers to make important decisions behind closed doors.

"The allegations put forward by the president of MVS are unsubstantiated and aimed at contaminating a technical decision in the [telecom](#) area linked to the 2.5-gigahertz bandwidth, which, apart from

the political arguments, only has to do with MVS's desire not to pay Mexicans for the true cost of the bandwidth," chief government spokeswoman Alejandra Sota told reporters.

MVS, which owns radio and TV stations, bought the rights several years ago to much of the 2.5-gigahertz bandwidth, which has been used for conventional television broadcasting but is becoming the standard frequency for 4G devices that can receive data at blazing speeds faster than most current wired Internet connections

As a result, the spectrum is one of the most highly coveted properties in the multibillion-dollar competition to provide linked packages of television, telephone and Internet service to Mexico's fast-growing home and business markets.

MVS has made relatively little use of the 2.5-gigahertz frequencies and the government announced this month that it was canceling the company's rights to much of them by pulling some of its dozens of licenses and refusing to renew others.

The move was widely seen as a victory for Mexico's two television giants, Televisa and TV Azteca, which are seeking to jointly enter the cellphone market now dominated by the world's richest man, Mexican business magnate Carlos Slim. The broadcasters, which have long had deep influence with both the current government and the incoming administration of a rival party, could use the 2.5-gigahertz frequencies for a new cellular network.

The chairman of MVS, which has been allied with Slim's empire, said business had little to do with the decision. He accused the government of taking revenge for the work of Carmen Aristegui, an influential morning radio talk-show host.

Aristegui's drive-time current-affairs program dedicated airtime last year to unsupported allegations by an opposition lawmaker that Calderon is an alcoholic. The discussion outraged Calderon's administration, which demanded an apology. Aristegui was briefly fired, then rehired, over the controversy. The government has denied pressuring MVS to take action against her.

"The president declaration that he wasn't involved in Carmen Aristegui's departure is false," MVS chairman Joaquin Vargas told reporters Wednesday. "So is his statement that the policies and daily operations of his public affairs office aren't mixed or confused with telecommunications policy."

Vargas showed reporters slides of a series of email conversations with high-ranking government officials. The exchange, he said, "reveals the extent of the government's pressure and interference in this matter. If you're quiet, they give you things. If you don't obey, they get rid of you."

Among other documents, Vargas showed a draft of what he said was a written apology over the alcoholism discussion that Sota's office produced for Aristegui to read on air.

Sota said she had simply added comments to a document produced by Vargas' office.

Aristegui ended up offering a partial apology for talking about the alcoholism charge.

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