

Terrorists planning summer attack!

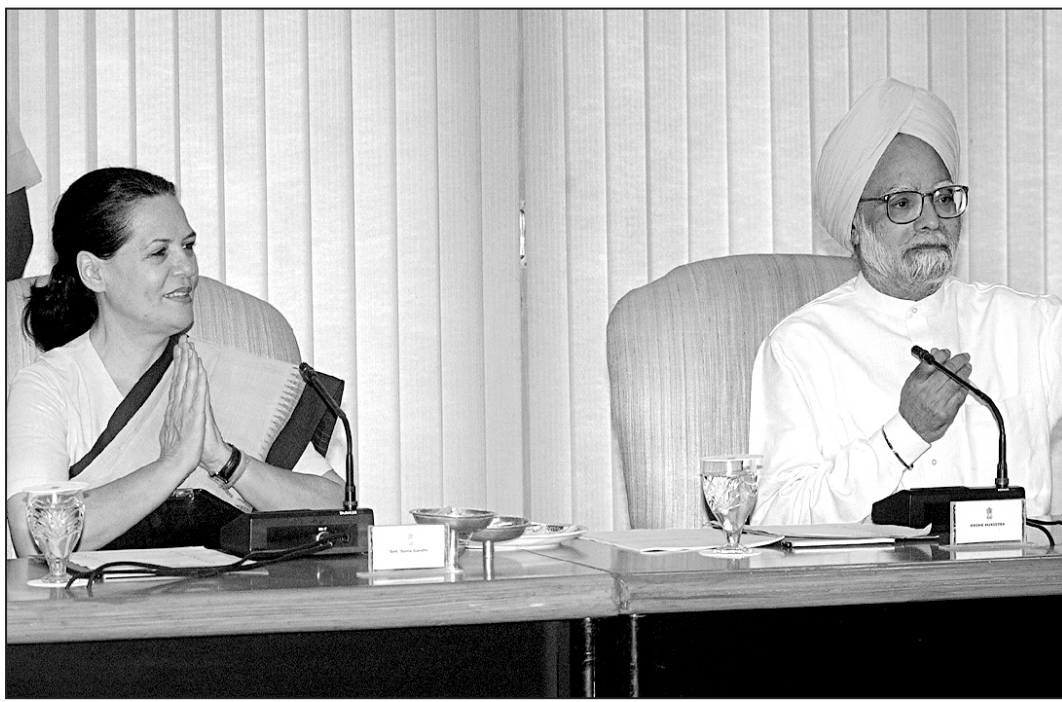
AP, Washington

Intelligence that has heightened concern throughout the government indicates that a group of terrorists already deployed inside the United States is preparing to launch a major attack this summer. US counter-terrorism and law enforcement officials say.

The intelligence was described Tuesday by a senior counter-terrorism official on condition of anonymity as extremely credible and backed by an unusually high level of corroboration.

The intelligence does not include a time, place or method of attack but is among the most disturbing received by the government since the al-Qaeda attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the official said.

"There is clearly a steady drumbeat of information that they are going to attack and hit us hard," the official said.



India's Congress Party President Sonia Gandhi (L) greets unseen members of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) as Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh (R) looks on during the UPA meeting at the Prime Minister's residence in New Delhi, yesterday. The meeting of leaders from Congress, its allies and the supporting parties including the Left, will discuss at the crucial meeting of UPA, to finalise the Common Minimum Programme (CMP) of the Congress-led coalition government which is likely to elect Sonia Gandhi as chairperson of the post-poll ruling alliance.

Indian govt meets to finalise new agenda

AFP, New Delhi

India's new ruling coalition was in a last-minute huddle with communists and other allies yesterday to finalise the left-leaning government's political agenda.

The programme, to be released Thursday, will focus mainly on economic issues and support policies promoting growth, but will also tackle foreign, education and other policy areas.

Some financial analysts fear the coalition's ambitions to push for economic reforms "with a human face" could bloat India's fiscal deficit and slow Asia's third-largest economy, which posted 10.4 per cent third-quarter growth.

After two days of talks in their power hub of Calcutta, capital of communist-ruled West Bengal, the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPM) decided not to be formally part of the Congress-led 20-party United Progress Alliance.

"The CPM will not be a partner of the Congress-led alliance but we will support it from outside," said Biman Bose, a senior party official told AFP.

At the same time, the communist party, which holds 43 seats that are key to the government's survival, and other leftist allies made it clear that withdrawing their support for the United Progress Alliance was not an option.

Senior communist leaders called on Congress party president Sonia Gandhi and discussed the government's agenda, to be known as the Common Minimum Programme. A full meeting of the ruling alliance was due to be held later Wednesday at Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's home to finalise the draft.

Communist leaders said the communists' decision to stay out of the ruling alliance was dictated by politics in the eastern state of West Bengal, where Congress is its chief opponent. Bose said party members had

studied the common programme draft and a final decision on whether to sign it would be taken after talks with other left parties later Wednesday.

"We've raised objection on some points. Whether CPM will sign the common minimum programme will be decided after its meeting with other left parties. We hope our suggestions will be accepted by the Congress," he said.

The leftists, with their strong anti-privatisation views, have asked the Congress to make major changes to the previous government's economic policies including disbanding the disinvestment ministry.

The push to arrive at an accord on the programme followed a day of drama in which Singh finally placated a southern regional ally unhappy over the allocation of ministerial portfolios who had threatened not to join the alliance.

Musharraf invites Sonia to visit Pakistan

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf has invited India's ruling Congress party chief Sonia Gandhi to visit his country.

The invitation was extended when Musharraf spoke to Sonia, whose party leads the 12-party United Progress Alliance, over telephone Tuesday evening, two days after he had called up Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

During the five-minute conversation, Musharraf congratulated the Congress chief on her party's victory in parliamentary elections. He "assured her of Pakistan's commitment to peace between the two countries and requested her to give support to the dialogue process," said a spokesman of Indian external affairs ministry.

Sonia thanked Musharraf for the greetings and pointed out that Congress had backed the previous Atal Bihari Vajpayee government's efforts in this regard, the spokesman added.

The Pakistan president recalled his telephonic talks with Singh and the Indian premiere's 'positive support' to the dialogue process.

Pakistan Foreign Minister Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri also spoke to his new Indian counterpart Natwar Singh over phone on Tuesday and congratulated him on assuming office and discussed on bilateral relations.

The foreign ministers expressed "their determination to continue and further expedite the present process in India-Pakistan relations," the spokesman said.

The telephonic conversations came close on the heels of postponement of India-Pakistan official-level talks on confidence building measures on nuclear issues, he added.

Congress wants Modi to resign

PTI, Gandhinagar

Calling for Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi's resignation in the wake of the electoral reverses suffered by BJP in the Lok Sabha polls, opposition Congress in the legislative assembly on Tuesday demanded registration of a case of 'human killing' against him.

An upbeat Congress, bolstered by its performance in the recent polls, made a scathing attack on Modi and said it would make a representation to the President and Prime Minister for his ouster.

Initiating the discussion on state budget, leader of opposition Amarsinh Chaudhary asked for Modi's resignation alleging that the Chief Minister had 'misled' people in the name of terrorism.

First ever Communist Speaker in India

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

Indian Parliament is set to have its first Communist Speaker in veteran Marxist leader Somnath Chatterjee with his party CPI (M) having agreed to occupy the post in response to the offer made by Congress party which leads the country's coalition government.

"We have considered the Congress offer and agreed to spare Chatterjee for the post," CPI (M) general secretary Harkishan Singh Surjeet told reporters in Kolkata on Tuesday evening after the party's highest decision-making forum the Politburo at its meeting there gave its stamp of approval.

The election of the new Speaker is slated for June 4 and with Congress and its allies, including the left parties, commanding the support of more than 300 MPs in Lok Sabha, 74-year-old Chatterjee,

the senior most parliamentarian at present, is likely to have a smooth passage to the post.

The CPI (M) acceptance of the Congress offer came in the backdrop of its decision not to join the Congress-led coalition government headed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Other Left parties also stayed out of the government.

The issue of the offer of the post of Lok Sabha Speaker also saw a divergence of opinion in the CPI (M) with a section of the party feeling that sparing Chatterjee for the post of Speaker would deprive it of an articulate voice during parliamentary debates on key issues.

Secondly, this section loosely called the hardliners—also feel that taking Parliament Speaker's post could send confusing signals to CPI (M) cadres not well versed in drawing the fine distinction between a legislative and executive posts,

party sources said.

If the perception in the party rank remains blurred on the difference between the legislative and executive posts, it will be politically unwise for the CPI (M) in states like West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura where the ruling Marxist party's main rival is Congress, said the sources.

In fact, a section in CPI (M) feel that the post of the Speaker could be construed as a "functional link" between the party and the Congress-led government which could invited political backlash.

Apparently, the moderates in the Marxist party triumphed over the hawks on the issue of accepting the Speaker's post, eight years after the latter had prevented former West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu from becoming the Prime Minister of a coalition government.

Caribbean storms claim hundreds

AFP, Santo Domingo

At least 502 people have been killed and hundreds missing following torrential rains and flooding in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, civil defense officials said.

At least 358 people were killed in Haiti, while another 144 people died in the Dominican Republic, officials said Tuesday.

The two countries form the mountainous island of Hispaniola, which bore the brunt of 10 days of heavy rain storms across much of the Caribbean.

Rescuers desperately searched for survivors in the Dominican border town of Jimani after a raging river carried away scores of sleeping women, children and men in the middle of the night. An estimated 135 people perished in Jimani.

Dominican authorities said 236 people were still missing in the floods and more than 13,000 people were left homeless after swollen

rivers turned into torrents.

The Soleil River burst its banks in the early hours of Monday, sweeping away entire households.

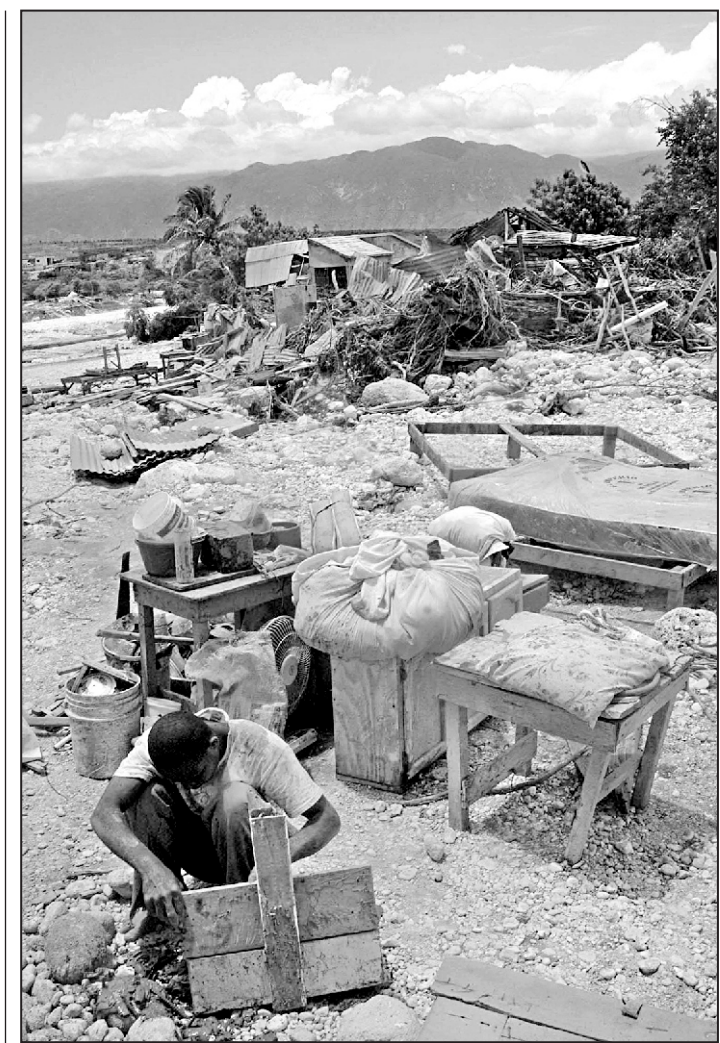
Swollen, mud-caked bodies, many of them naked children, were piled in the local morgue as grief-stricken relatives wept, television images showed.

Dorka Dotele lost her four children. "This is a terrible blow, terrible, they are all gone," she wept.

Dominican National Emergency Committee chief Radhames Lora Salcedo said that for sanitary reasons any dead that could not be quickly identified would be buried in mass graves.

Lora Salcedo said the river "wiped out the town", burying people or sweeping them away as they slept.

"The bodies of 23 women, 10 men, 26 girls and 17 boys are in the morgue at Jimani hospital," said the establishment's director, Francis Moquete.



A man collects his belongings after a flood swept the Dominican border town of Jimani, 280 Km west of Santo Domingo, on Tuesday. At least 502 people have been killed and hundreds missing following torrential rains and flooding in Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Rescuers desperately searched for survivors in Jimani after a raging river carrying away scores of sleeping women, children and men in the middle of the night.

Russia to pull out workers from Iraq

2 Russian electricity workers killed in attack on bus in Baghdad

AFP, Baghdad

Two Russian contractors were killed outside Baghdad and another six wounded yesterday when assailants attacked their bus, and their employer announced the evacuation of all its staff from Iraq.

The two Interenergосervice workers along with two Iraqis died, hospital sources said, when their bus came under fire by unknown gunmen near a power plant being rebuilt by the firm some 50 kilometers (30 miles) south of here.

Interenergосervice, the largest Russian company in Iraq, announced it was pulling out its remaining 200-odd workforce in the wake of the attack. "The decision has been taken to evacuate all our staff" in Iraq, acting director Alexander Rybinsky told AFP.

The foreign ministry in Russia, which has no troops in Iraq and opposed the US-led invasion, has repeatedly urged its citizens to leave the country.

"The Interenergосervice bus came under fire. Two Russian technicians were killed," the foreign ministry said. The company said six more of its employees were wounded.

The wounded were taken to Baghdad's Yarouk hospital for treatment and the Russian embassy and authorities in Iraq were investigating the attack.

Interenergосervice already had one employee killed in Iraq earlier this month.

The two Russians who survived that attack were kidnapped and then released just over a week later, and one of them decided to stay on in Iraq and continue working.

Iraqi government takes shape

Britain dismisses report on rift with US

REUTERS, Baghdad

Iraq's new government is taking shape, with US officials leaking names of a prime minister and president, but confusion remains over what power, if any, they will have over a vast US army in the country.

Five weeks before the interim government is due to take over from the US occupation authority on June 30, US officials said the prime minister would be Hussain Shahristani.

Shahristani, a Shia Muslim nuclear scientist who paid for his defiance of Saddam Hussein with torture, prison and exile, told the news agency he did not want the job but was ready to shoulder the responsibility of steering Iraq to elections.

There was no let up in violence, which US President George W. Bush has said may increase during the transition. US troops fought Mehdi Army militia in the holy city of Najaf and arrested a senior aide to their leader, Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr.

US tanks and airborne gunships were in action before dawn around Najaf, where medical staff said at least nine people were killed and 36 wounded in fighting at an ancient cemetery.

Within hours of a draft UN resolution being presented by the United States and Britain seeking Security Council endorsement of its transition plan, there were conflicting interpretations of how sovereign the new government would be over 150,000 US, British and other troops in Iraq.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair, who had appeared to go further than US Secretary of State Colin Powell in his vision of Iraqi control of US forces, denied he was at odds with Washington over the command of troops.

"There is absolutely no doubt at all that...the ultimate strategic and political decision-making passes to the Iraqi government after the 30th of June," he told parliament.

"Once strategic decisions have been made, the running of any operations is under the military forces and the commanders of

those forces."

United Nations envoy Lakhdar Brahimi is in Baghdad to pick a government team that will satisfy competing claims among Iraq's various religious and ethnic groups and can be counted on to work with the Americans to organise elections in the new year.

Shahristani told Reuters: "The consultations have not been concluded yet and Mr Brahimi has not made his recommendation."

"I personally prefer to serve the people of Iraq in humanitarian fields as I have done since my escape from Abu Ghraib in 1991," he wrote in an e-mail in English. "However, putting the country on route to democracy and protecting the population from terrorists and violence is the responsibility of Iraqis, and we have to burden that responsibility."

Thirty government appointments are expected in a week or so.

Asked about Brahimi's choices, a source with close ties to the Bush administration said: "Shahristani for prime minister."



Seen through a shattered window, an Iraqi policeman inspects the interior of a bus in which four people were killed in Baghdad yesterday. Two Russian Interenergосervice workers along with two Iraqis were killed and another six wounded when assailants attacked their bus as they made their way to work at the al-Dura power plant. Interenergосervice, the largest Russian company in Iraq, announced it was pulling out its remaining 200-odd workforce in the wake of the attack.