

PHONE TAPPING OF POLITICIANS Uproars in Rajya Sabha

PALLAB BHATTACHARYA, New Delhi

The issue of unauthorised telephone tapping of senior political leaders created uproar in Indian parliament when the government rejected the charge asserting that it had not authorised any such action.

"I wish to state categorically that no telephone tapping or eavesdropping on political leaders was authorised by the previous UPA government. Nor has the present UPA government authorised any such activity," Home Minister Palaniappan Chidambaram told the Lok Sabha.

He said the report in 'Outlook' magazine on phone tapping was thoroughly inquired into and "nothing has been found in the records of the NTRO (National Technical Research Organisation, an intelligence agency) to substantiate the allegations."

The magazine published an article which pointed out allegedly that the phones of Federal Agriculture Minister Sharad Pawar, who heads Nationalist Congress Party, an ally of Congress party, senior Congress leader Digvijay Singh, CPI(M) leader Prakash Karat and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar had been tapped.

Both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha were adjourned after assembling for the day following uproar by the opposition on this matter including slogan shouting to set up a Joint Parliamentary Committee on the issue. BJP member M Venkaiah Naidu demanded Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to make a statement on this matter.

When Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Prithviraj Chavan said the home minister could make a statement on the issue, Naidu said "it is a very serious issue. The phones of not only cabinet ministers, but Chief Ministers and political leaders are being tapped."

The home minister added, "Further enquiries are being made into the allegations by the magazine. If any evidence is forthcoming or discovered, the matter will be thoroughly investigated by the appropriate agencies".



Bhutanese school children await dignitaries arriving for the 16th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (Saarc) in Thimphu yesterday. Bhutan is set to host the two-day annual summit of South Asian leaders, which is going to start on April 28.

1984 INDIA RIOT
Congress did not initiate anti-Sikh unrest
Says Gadkari

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, New Delhi

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) president Nitin Gadkari says it's not entirely correct to blame the then Congress government for initiating the anti-Sikh riots of 1984.

In an exclusive interview to BBC Hindi Service, Gadkari said: "Some people might be involved in those riots but it would not be entirely correct to say that the riots were initiated by the government."

"Nobody can manipulate or organise such incidents; these are unfortunate reactions of the people at large."

Gadkari was replying to questions on the alleged involvement of the BJP and its government in the demolition of the Babri mosque and the 1992 Gujarat riots.

"Gujarat riots were unfortunate. But when riots take place in other states, why aren't governments and chief ministers blamed for that?" the newly elected BJP president asked.

Blasts target Afghan police chief

AP, Kandahar

Three explosions struck Kandahar yesterday morning, killing two civilians in the key southern Afghan city where the US is planning an offensive to clear out the Taliban.

Two police officers and one civilian were wounded, authorities said.

The first two blasts one caused by a roadside bomb and the other from a motorbike packed with explosives about 30 feet (10 meters) away happened within a minute of each other in downtown Kandahar, said Deputy Provincial Police Chief Fazel Ahmad Sherzad. About two hours later, a third blast struck north of the city.

The looming offensive and continuing crime and insecurity have rattled Kandahar's half-million inhabitants.

"The security in this city is deteriorating," said Enayutullah Khan, 43, a rickshaw driver. "People leave their homes only to find food for their children, otherwise we don't leave the house."

Kandahar is the largest city in southern Afghanistan and the birthplace of the Taliban, which still has considerable support here. A US-led operation planned for this summer aims to clear Kandahar of Taliban fighters and break the grip of warlords who have allowed the fighters to slip back in.

President Barack Obama has ordered 30,000 more troops into Afghanistan, in part to back up the Kandahar offensive. The operation will be a critical test of the Afghan war.

But the Taliban have launched increasingly deadly attacks ahead of the offensive. Since April 12, at least 20 civilians have been killed in Kandahar, including children. Aid workers also have been targeted.

Monday's first two explosions, which killed two civilians and injured one police officer and one civilian, happened while a convoy of police vehicles was passing by, the Interior Ministry said.

One of the explosions went off near a car belonging to Sherzad, the deputy police chief, but he was not inside the vehicle at the time. One policeman was injured in the blast in the city's north.

On Sunday, meanwhile, one Afghan police officer was killed and another was wounded during an attack on a militant compound in the Wordoch district of Badakhshkan province northeast of Kabul, according to an Interior Ministry statement released Monday. The statement said two militants were killed in the operation. During a search of the compound, authorities found explosives and eight different kinds of roadside bombs.

Also Sunday, government forces on a mission to eradicate poppies in eastern Nangrahar province came under fire, said Ghafor Khan, a provincial police spokesman. During the gunbattle three Afghans - one from the Afghan Army and two from the border police - were killed. Nine more members of various Afghan forces were also injured. Six Taliban militants were killed in the fighting and 12 were injured, Khan said.

Pakistan struggles with power plan

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES ONLINE, Islamabad

Confusion reigned supreme in Pakistan with some government departments remaining open while others staying closed on Saturday, following the prime minister's decision that Pakistan's public sector will have a 5-day week.

The confusion comes as Pakistan struggles to bridge the gap between electricity production and consumption - and to try and reduce the number of blackouts the country faces each day.

On Saturday, schools were closed in some parts, while they were open in other areas. Banks remained open despite the Central Bank's direction that they stay shut.

The measures have not gone down well with people. Muhammad Shah Abdali, a landlord in Sindh, says that on a "good day," there is power for 6 hours.

"Otherwise we have blackouts for almost 22 hours".

Nepal govt asks Maoists to call off protests

INDO ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, Kathmandu

Ahead of a show of might announced by Nepal's Maoist parties in the capital on May Day, the ruling parties yesterday urged the former guerrillas to call off the protests, saying they were against the peace pact that helped the banned party return to mainstream politics four years ago.

Amidst reports that the former rebels were bringing in cadre in the capital by the truck-load as well as primitive weapons like batons, Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal held a crisis meeting with 10

ruling parties Monday, ending in the appeal.

In a joint statement, the parties said they were concerned at the Maoists giving their cadre paramilitary training as well as staging marches with weapons in preparation for a rally in the capital May 1. They also said the former rebels were spreading terror and mounting an extortion drive.

"We ask the Maoists to immediately stop such lawless and disorderly conduct and call off the protests," the ruling parties said.

While there was no visible reaction from India, there is growing western

concern, especially at the Maoist threat of an indefinite general strike from May 2 if the prime minister does not step down.

The US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Robert O. Blake, Jr, is in Kathmandu prior to attending the 16th SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) Summit in Bhutan.

Blake met Nepal Monday and will also hold talks with the Maoists and other political leaders, government officials and business leaders to discuss the peace process and the constitution drafting process.

Manmohan, Gilani to hold 'limited dialogue'

THE INDIAN EXPRESS ONLINE

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh will hold "limited bilateral dialogue" with his Pakistani counterpart Yousuf Raza Gilani on April 28, on the sidelines of the Saarc summit in Thimphu which marks the silver anniversary of the South Asian cooperation movement.

The resumption of talks, stalled since the 26/11 attacks, is New Delhi's initiative to resolve the stand-off between the two countries on Indus water sharing and a related hydroelectric Kishanganga project on which Islamabad has served a notice in the International Court of Arbitration, said senior

government officials.

"The talks will mainly centre on these issues while reiterating New Delhi's stand that Islamabad deliver, through action against those behind the Mumbai attacks," said an official. Pakistan is using the water dispute to divert international attention from 26/11 and the larger issue of terrorism, which India regards as the main issue between the two neighbours.

The Kishanganga project is seen as the next bone of contention between India and Pakistan, with the latter objecting to run-of-the-river hydroelectric project that will require diverting the water of the Kishanganga river through an underground tunnel.


China arrests Tibetan writer

AFP, Beijing

A leading Tibetan writer who worked for a Chinese state publishing house has been taken into custody after criticising the government's response to this month's deadly earthquake.

Tagyal, who goes by the pen name Zhogs Dung, was arrested at his workplace in the north-western city of Xining on Friday last week, numerous websites devoted to Tibetan culture said.

Police removed computers from his home the following day and showed the arrest warrant to his wife, they said.



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