

Indian SC issues notice to scrap 2G licenses

PTI, New Delhi

The Supreme Court yesterday issued notice to the Centre on the plea seeking cancellation of 2G spectrum licenses allocated during the tenure of former Telecom Minister A. Raja.

The apex court also issued notices to 11 companies which allegedly did not fulfil the roll out obligations as per the terms and conditions of allocation of the spectrum.

The apex court also impleaded the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) as a respondent in the petition.

A bench comprising justices G S Singhvi and A.K. Ganguly sought the response from the Department of Telecom and the companies within three weeks and posted the matter for hearing on February 1.

"After considering submission of the

petitioner's counsel that since TRAI has sent a letter dated November 15, 2010 to Secretary, DoT, which indicated that many companies have not complied with the roll out obligation and not started the services. We deem it fit to entertain the petition," the bench said.

"Accordingly, TRAI, through its Secretary, is impleaded as a party," it said.

The bench was hearing a petition filed by an NGO Centre for Public Interest Litigation (CPIL) seeking cancellation of the licenses alleging that all norms were violated.

The companies which were issued notices were Etisalat, Uninor, Loop Telecom, Videocon, STel, Allianz Infra, Idea Cellular, Tata Teleservices, Sistema Shyam Teleservices, Dishnet wireless and VodafoneEssar.

Discard blasphemy law

Pope urges Pak govt

AFP, Vatican City

Pope Benedict XVI yesterday called on Pakistan to scrap a blasphemy law after the murder of the governor of Punjab, saying the legislation was a pretext for "acts of injustice and violence".

"I once more encourage the leaders of that country to take the necessary steps to abrogate that law," he said.

"The tragic murder of the governor of Punjab shows the urgent need to make progress in this direction."

The pope, who was speaking at a traditional New Year's meeting with foreign ambassadors to the Vatican, said the anti-blasphemy legislation was an example of "norms prejudicing the right to religious freedom."



US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates (L) and China's Minister of National Defence General Liang Guanglie (R) stand at attention during their respective national anthems at an honours arrival ceremony in Beijing yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

NEWS IN brief

3 Afghan police killed by Taliban car bomb

AFP, Kandahar

Three policemen were killed yesterday in a car bombing claimed by the Taliban in southern Afghanistan's troubled Kandahar province, near the border with Pakistan, police said.

"A car bomber approached the national police patrol cars and smashed his car into the police vehicles, killing three policemen and destroying the vehicle," General Abdul Raziq, chief of Kandahar's border police, told AFP.

Israel official threatened over anti-Arab probe

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel police were investigating yesterday a video circulated on the Internet which called for the death of a top legal official who urged a probe into anti-Arab incitement on Facebook.

The video, which reportedly called for the death of deputy Attorney General Shai Nitzan, was distributed through an e-mail that appeared to be sent from the account of Justice Minister Yaacov Neeman.

Hillary praises Sudan for south polls, urges aid

AFP, Abu Dhabi

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton praised yesterday the Sudanese government for allowing the secession referendum in the south, and called on Arab states to aid both sides.

"I give credit to the government in Khartoum for having agreed in 2005 to let the people of the south to vote on their own future," Clinton told university students in Abu Dhabi in a programme to be broadcast on the Arab television channel, MBC.

"This could be a great example of a peaceful outcome to a longstanding conflict," she said.

She said that the "very poor" south needs investments in infrastructure, schools and hospi-

Iran held Israel-linked 'spies, terrorists'

BBC ONLINE

The Iranian authorities have arrested a "network of spies" which they say was behind the assassination of a nuclear scientist in January last year, state television reports.

In a brief statement, the authorities said the network was linked to Israel's Mossad secret service.

Iran's intelligence ministry said Mossad had used bases in certain European and non-European countries as well as Iran's neighbouring states for the purpose of the assassination, as well

Spain's Basque rebels call 'permanent truce'

BBC ONLINE

The Basque separatist group Eta has announced a permanent ceasefire in its fight for independence from Spain.

In a video statement sent to the media, the group said the truce would be "internationally verifiable". Eta's campaign for independence for the Basque region has cost more than 800 lives since 1968 but it called a halt to armed attacks last year.

The Spanish government has reacted cautiously to previous claims from from Eta that it was ending violence.

New parliament to meet January 31

Says Myanmar state TV

AFP, Yangon

Myanmar's new parliament is to convene for the first time on January 31, state media announced yesterday, two months after the military-ruled country held a rare but widely criticised election.

The two-chamber parliament will meet in the capital Naypyidaw, while new regional legislatures will convene at the same time, government-controlled television reported, quoting an order from junta chief Senior General Than Shwe.

The main army-backed party claimed an overwhelming victory in the November 7 poll -- Myanmar's first in 20 years -- with about 80 percent of available seats. An official final tally of results has not been announced.

Under Myanmar's 2008 constitution, parliament need not meet more than once a year.

One quarter of the places in parliament were already reserved for the military, which together with its political proxy will have a comfortable majority for passing laws and electing the president.

Flash floods kill two in Queensland

BBC ONLINE

Flash floods have hit Queensland, killing two people with several more missing, as heavy rains continue to pound the Australian state.

A massive deluge overwhelmed Toowoomba, a city west of the state capital Brisbane, without warning.

Helicopters have joined the rescue operation to reach those trapped in cars and on the roofs of buildings.

Twelve people have died since the tropical storms began in November, the worst flooding in the state in decades.

US, China play down military rivalry

AFP, Beijing

The defence chiefs of the United States and China yesterday sought to play down a growing military rivalry between the two countries, saying both sides wanted to bolster security ties to ease tensions.

US Defense Secretary Robert Gates and his Chinese counterpart, General Liang Guanglie, struck a positive tone after two hours of talks in Beijing, saying they both want to build a military dialogue.

"I think that General Liang and I made significant progress this morning," Gates said.

But there was no major breakthrough ahead of a visit to the United States next week by Chinese President Hu Jintao, and no sign from Beijing that it is ready to overlook the thorny issue of US arms sales to Taiwan.

"China's position has been clear and consistent. We are against it," Liang said of the arms deals with self-ruled Taiwan, which have repeatedly prompted Beijing to suspend military relations.

At a joint press conference with Gates, Liang signalled no change to Beijing's standpoint that military contacts could be derailed by another sale of American arms to Taiwan.

China suspended military ties with the United States a year ago over Washington's sale of more than \$6 billion in arms to Taipei, and tentative plans for an earlier visit to Beijing by Gates were called off.

Gates repeated the US view that military ties were too important to be "subject to shifting political winds," and said he came away from the talks "optimistic" about the prospects of better defence relations.

South rejects N Korea's proposal for talks

AFP, Seoul

North Korea yesterday officially proposed dialogue with South Korea, less than two months after launching a deadly bombardment of a border island, but a sceptical Seoul quickly rejected the offer.

The South said it was willing to hold government-level talks, but only if the North admits responsibility for a series of provocations and confirms a commitment to scrapping its nuclear programme.

The North's official news agency said three state bodies sent notices to the South's unification ministry calling for

talks and announcing the reopening this Wednesday of a Red Cross border liaison office.

They proposed holding a working-level contact in the North's border city of Kaesong on January 27, and suggested talks between Red Cross organisations from the two sides in the South's city of Munsan on February 1.

"Our side will not accept the North's proposals," said Lee Jong-Joo, spokeswoman for the ministry which handles cross-border contacts. "It's not time to hold such talks as proposed by North Korea."

UN urges Nepal's leaders to agree on ex-fighters

AFP, Kathmandu

The head of a departing UN peace mission in Nepal yesterday urged political leaders to agree on new arrangements for monitoring thousands of former Maoist fighters in camps across the country.

The UN mission in Nepal (UNMIN) was set up in 2007 with a one-year mandate to oversee the country's transition to peace after a decade-long war between Maoist rebels and government forces in which at least 16,000 people died.

Its term had to be repeatedly extended amid disagreements between political leaders on how pledges made in the 2006 peace deal should be fulfilled, but in September the United Nations announced the mission would close on January 15.

Secretary General Ban Ki-moon admitted the timing of UNMIN's closure was not optimal, but said it made little sense to keep it open "without any meaningful progress by the parties on political issues".

These include the integration of the 19,000 former Maoist fighters still living in UN-monitored camps into the state security forces.

The decision means the UN monitors who have patrolled the camps since they were set up in 2007 will leave on Saturday. Ban's representative in Nepal urged the government and the Maoists to agree on new arrangements.

S Korea, Japan explore deeper defence ties

AFP, Seoul

South Korea and Japan agreed yesterday to push for talks on forging their first military accord since Tokyo's brutal colonial rule over the Korean peninsula ended in 1945, officials said.

The agreement was reached at talks between Defence Minister Kim Kwan-Jin and his Japanese counterpart Toshimi Kitazawa in response to recent provocations by North Korea, Kim's ministry said.

They agreed on "close coordination" after reaching a consensus that a series of provocations had seriously undermined regional peace, it said in a statement.

"In particular, the two ministers shared views that North Korea's recent provocations, including the artillery attack on Yeonpyeong island and the revelation of its uranium enrichment facility, can never be accepted," it said.

Bodyguard admits killing Pak governor

BBC ONLINE

The bodyguard accused of shooting Pakistani governor Salman Taseer has confessed in court to the killing.

Malik Mumtaz Hussein Qadri told the Anti-Terrorism Court in Rawalpindi that he had acted alone in the attack.

The hearing came as the Pope called for the repeal of Pakistan's blasphemy law; Mr Taseer's support for changes to the law was blamed for his assassination.

US charges Arizona shooting suspect

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

The man suspected of killing six people and seriously wounding a US congresswoman in the state of Arizona has been charged with murder and attempted murder a day after a shooting rampage.

Prosecutors filed five separate charges against Jared Loughner, 22, in the federal court in Phoenix on Sunday over the attack.

The US justice department said Loughner, who is due to appear in court yesterday, is suspected of shooting more than a dozen people including Gabrielle Giffords, a US congresswoman, at a political event hosted by her in Tucson.

John Roll, a US federal judge, and Gabriel Zimmerman, one of Gifford's aides were among the six people killed in Saturday's incident.

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