

NEWS WRAP

AGD

Without any public debate before the bill in question was introduced, and with scarcely any parliamentary debate before it passed at the beginning of 2009, a month after Pakistani terrorists attacked Mumbai at end 2008, the Union Government of India, initiated legislation enabling it to eavesdrop on electronic communication, and block websites on grounds of national security. No guidelines have been included in the law about the extent to which an individual's right to privacy would be breached. Reassurances were absent on the due process to be followed when it came to restricting access to websites. As the government uses vague discretion instead of firm rules to police India's internet, over the past two years there have been numerous cases of misuse. The government body to protect India's information infrastructure, named Indian Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT-IN) had in March 2011 blocked a text-message provider, that sends out advertisements in bulk, over mobile phone. CERT-IN had also blocked Type-pad.com, a publishing platform used frequently by bloggers. The restrictions on the two websites have since been lifted.

During 2009, a Delhi Court had ordered CERT-IN to block access to Zone-H.org, an Italian Security Giant that acts as a repository of hacked websites. E 2 Labs, which claims to work for the government, had dragged Zone-H to court in 2009, on grounds of defamation. The Department of Telecom does not offer any explanations, and the recent cases are similar to the 2006 government ban on Blogspot.com, shortly after the bomb blasts on Mumbai's suburban trains. CERT-IN operates under guidelines which state that information related to website blocking is classified, and its mandate does not include communicating with the public. There is no channel for redressal for those who own the affected sites. Terrorists have made the security personnel of India's home ministry more electronically vigilant.

COUNTER OFFENSIVE

The Supreme Court in Feb 2009 had questioned how the Chattisgarh State Government could arm common people or those associated with *Salwa Judum*, a people's militia to combat the Maoists in Chattisgarh. In April, 2011, the Supreme Court disapproved the idea of arming local people to counter Maoists, and sought an explanation from the Chattisgarh Government for creating an anti-Maoist armed group of special police, namely Koya Commandos. A year earlier, in the tribal dominated jungle area of Chattisgarh's Dantewade district, the Maoists attacked security forces and shot 76 jawans. As follow-up security clean up, police burnt down hundreds of huts, killed a few people, and raped women in a rampage from 11 to 16 April 2010. The Maoists are still stronger than ever in Chattisgarh's 40,000 sq km Bastar region, which includes Dantewade.

Additional security forces have been deployed in Bastar's war zone. The local tribal population, who have been poor for decades have been the worst sufferers in the clash between security forces and armed rebels. Many common people are being killed by police in the operations against the CPI (Maoist), and the Maoists are also targeting common villagers for spying for local police, and being in association with *Salwa Judum*. The anti-personnel mines are designed to explode by any movement or pressure, of only a few kilograms.

ARAB SPRING

Revolts in North Africa promote core western values, such as democracy and individual rights, as subscribed by USA and the European Union. Even though western sponsorship

has been far from brutal or overt, much of the corrupt and autocratic order facing revolts in the Middle East has been western-backed. Anti-western regimes, such as Iran and Syria, have existed alongside the pro-western governments in the Middle East. Rulers such as Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Ali Abdullah Saleh in Yemen, and King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia have been key western allies. In refusing to allow regional allies to stay in power through force, USA has endangered economic and security interests in an emerging Middle East, which is also a traditional sphere of its imperial influence. The Iranian government in Tehran and Al-Qaeda in Pakistan are also influencing events in the Arab world.

JAPANESE SUPPLIERS

Japan's triple disaster of earthquake, tsunami and nuclear energy accident has disrupted industrial production and sales. The country is an important source of all manner of advanced components, used heavily in Asia and elsewhere, to assemble final goods. 60% of the world's silicon wafers, the building blocks of computer chips, are manufactured in Japan. A quarter of the world's supply has been reduced, following shutdown of two factories in Japan, by the earthquake. 90% of a substance called BT resin, used to make printed circuit boards, are produced in Japan. While inventories of each component seem to be holding up, supply disruptions from Japan for components like airflow sensors, and computer chips, have led to closure of automobile plants in USA, and cutting back of production in several European plants. Most chip makers keep multiple weeks of inventory of silicon wafers, on hand. In a large number of Japanese plants which manufacture products such as batteries, chips and home audio equipment, operations have been temporarily or partially suspended because of quake damage or power issues. □