

Defence Ministry owns over 1.2 lakh acres of land: Antony

NEW DELHI, Aug 5:

Land under the control of Defence Ministry was 305,886 acres before Independence while 824,484 acres of land were acquired after India attained freedom, the Lok Sabha was informed today.

In a written reply, Defence Minister A K Antony said about 12,364 acres of defence land was under encroachment till September 2012. Action was taken for removal of encroachment under the provisions of Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants Act, 1971 and Cantonment Act, 2006).

Asked about the handing over of 4.84 acres of defence land in Jodhpur to private developers, Mr Antony said the land was handed over to the Major Maharaja Hari Singh Charitable Trust by local military authorities in August 2007.

Inquiries had revealed that army officials at Jodhpur had illegally transferred the lands with an alleged collusion of Defence Estates officials, he added.

The matter was before the Central Bureau of Investigation which had filed a preliminary inquiry report in the case, the Minister said. (UNI)

Raghuvansh opposes amendments to RTI Act

NEW DELHI, Aug 5:

Senior RJD leader Raghuvansh Prasad Singh today opposed amendments to the RTI Act which seek to keep political parties out of its ambit saying politicians should not fear transparency.

"I am not in agreement with both - parties coming together to seek exclusion from RTI as well as Government bringing amendments to the law to that effect. Why are we afraid of being transparent? Rather there should have been a provision of self disclosure. But in this case, we are now denying to give information even when it is sought," he told reporters.

Singh, who was a minister in UPA I which had brought the RTI Act, wondered, "How can we exclude ourselves from being transparent when we want everybody else to be transparent? I feel ashamed that all parties have come together to prevent the application of the transparency law on them."

All political parties have joined hands to oppose a CIC order which said that six major parties - Congress, BJP, NCP, CPM, CPI and BSP - are public authorities and come under the ambit of RTI.

The Union Cabinet last week approved amendment to RTI Act saying political parties were an association of individuals and not public authorities.

Since the CIC order is still operational, Government is keen to pass the bill in the first week of the Monsoon Session itself. (PTI)

Priyanka pays tribute to cops in special 'Zanjeer' song

MUMBAI, Aug 5:

Bollywood actress Priyanka Chopra will be seen in a never before avatar in a special song for her upcoming release 'Zanjeer' which salutes the bravery of Mumbai Police.

The song called 'Mumbai Ke Heroes', is dedicated to the cops. It is the film's way to salute the unsung heroes. The actress will be seen donning a khaki uniform in the number, a statement issued by the makers said.

"Priyanka looks stunning in her police attire. She was very excited for this look," a source close to the production unit said in the statement.

Along with Priyanka, Apoorva Lakshia's directorial venture also stars Ram Charan, Prakash Raj, Mahie Gill, Atul Kulkarni and Sanjay Dutt. It releases on September 6. (PTI)

Govt plans to set up 500 new Kendriya Vidyalayas

NEW DELHI, Aug 5:

The Government has fixed a target of setting up 500 new Kendriya Vidyalayas under the twelfth five year plan.

However, the actual sanction and opening of schools would depend on the availability of funds, HRD Minister M M Pallam Raju said in response to a question in the Rajya Sabha.

"The 12th plan (2012-17) has a target for opening 500 new KV's during the plan period. Actual sanction and opening of each new KV depends on availability of funds," he said in a written reply.

"During the 12th Five Year plan, till date, no new KV has been sanctioned on account of funds constraints," the minister said.

He also said that 133 proposals for opening new KV's had been received from 23 State Governments during the last three years. (PTI)

US closes 19 missions after intercepting Al-Qaeda threats

WASHINGTON, Aug 5:

The US has extended closure of 19 diplomatic missions in the Middle East and north Africa till August 10 as a precaution after it intercepted Al-Qaeda's most serious threat in recent years to target its embassies.

The United States initially closed 22 diplomatic posts for the day yesterday. The State Department last week issued a worldwide travel alert warning Americans that Al-Qaeda may be planning attacks in August, particularly in the Middle East.

A State Department official asserted that this was not an indication of a new threat stream, but merely an indication of US commitment to exercise caution and take appropriate steps to protect its employees and visitors to its facilities.

"Given that a number of our embassies and consulates were going to be closed in accordance with local custom and practice for the bulk of the week for Eid celebration at the end of Ramadan, and out of an abundance of caution, we've decided to extend closure of several embassies and consulates, including a small number of additional posts," State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki said.

However, a top military commander said that the US has intercepted al-Qaeda plot to target not only Americans, but also citizens from Western countries.

"There is a significant threat stream, and we're reacting to it," General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, told the ABC news. "That part of it is unspecified. But the intent seems clear. The intent is to attack Western - not just the US - interests."

Congressman Charles Albert Ruppberger said the terror threat is credible and is based on intelligence reports.

"We can only say the intelligence that we get. And, by the way, intelligence is the best defence against terrorism. Those operatives are in place because we've received information that high-level people from Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula are talking about a major attack. And these are people at a high-level," said Ruppberger, who is ranking member of the House Intelligence Committee.

"Now, whatever that intelligence is, we act upon it because our first priority, again, is to protect the Americans in other parts of the world," he added.

"We know that Al-Qaeda and other people out there want to attack us and kill us and our allies. The good news is that we've picked up intelligence. And that's what we do. That's what NSA does," said Ruppberger.

"NSA's sole purpose is to get information and intelligence to protect Americans from attack," he said.

ISRO to focus on R&D, industries' space pie to be scaled up

BANGALORE, Aug 5:

Industries' contribution to India's space programme would be significantly scaled up as ISRO looks to focus predominantly on Research & Development (R&D), the space agency's chairman K Radhakrishnan said.

Radhakrishnan said the industries associated with Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) are all currently "jobbing partners" but their role would go up further, in view of programmes to enhance the production of satellites and rockets.

According to ISRO officials, more than 500 small, medium and large-scale industries participate in the space programme in the form of hardware development and supply, software and other services.

Radhakrishnan, also Secretary in the Department of Space, said nearly 80 per cent of direct cost of Polar Satellite Launch vehicle, for example, flows to industries, a figure which would go up further, but

"It's an orchestra you have to mobilise with ISRO also being there," he said.

"We have to work out a model in which the amount of energy and resources spent by ISRO for these launch vehicles will be reduced and they (industries) will take up.

"We (ISRO) want to predominantly focus on new developments and research and devel-

opment for the future. That's the basic idea," added Radhakrishnan.

Bangalore-headquartered ISRO plans to undertake 58 missions — 25 launch vehicles (rockets) and 33 satellites — during the 12th Plan. Work has already started on building a six-tonne class communication satellite.

Plans are also on to launch an earth observation satellite having capability to get 50 metre resolution pictures from geostationary orbit, the ISRO Chairman said.

ISRO's upcoming satellites Cartosat-2D and Cartosat-2C would have spatial resolution of 0.6 metres and Cartosat-3 0.25 metres.

Astrosat, an astronomical observatory for study of cosmic sources, would be launched next year, he said.

"Astrosat is going to be a very major initiative for astronomy not only for ISRO and India but for the world". (PTI)

Radhakrishnan said ISRO is working out a model by which industries would get into the task of integration of stages and rockets. At present, industrial association with ISRO has several layers but the space agency now wants to bring all such partners together.

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Will back food bill if Govt protects farmers' interests: Yadav

NEW DELHI, Aug 5:

Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav today said that his party was ready to support the food security bill if the government promises to protect the interests of farmers and ensures that they get profit over their produce.

His remarks are significant as they come against the backdrop of reports that the issue of suspended IAS officer Durga Sakthi Nagpal could cast a shadow over Congress' bid to secure SP's support on the food measure.

"If they promise that the farmers' interests will not be ignored and they will get profit over their produce, then we can support the bill," Yadav told here.

Asked about the food security bill, he said, "We cannot allow the interests of the farmers to be ignored," he said.

The SP supremo, however, indicated that action against Nagpal, a 2010 batch IAS officer, was taken to "prevent" communal disturbance which otherwise could have erupted after the demolition of the wall of a mosque.

A senior SP leader, on the condition of anonymity, asked as to what was the "provocation" for the officer to demolish the wall without a complaint.

There is also a view in the party that Congress chief Sonia Gandhi, who on Saturday wrote to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to ensure that the officer is not treated unfairly, got herself "unnecessarily dragged" into the controversy and it was possible that she was "not apprised of the full facts". (PTI)

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NEW DELHI/LUCKNOW, Aug 5:

A defiant Samajwadi Party (SP) today appeared heading for a confrontation with the Centre over the IAS officer's suspension issue, asserting that UP government's decision is "correct and final" and went a step further taunting it to remove all IAS officers from the state.

Firing the first salvo, SP supremo Mulayam Singh Yadav said the decision to suspend IAS officer Durga Sakthi Nagpal, who hit the spotlight for cracking down on the sand mafia, is justified.

"It is correct. It is final," he told reporters outside Parliament House with a firm "no" on being asked whether the suspension order would be revoked.

Amid the brewing hostility between the SP and the Centre over the suspension issue, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh said Government is in touch with the state authorities on the issue and that laid down rules will be followed.

The unrelenting stand of the ruling SP government was also voiced in Lucknow by Chief Minister Akhilesh Yadav who made it clear that officials who make "mistakes" will be punished.

"There might be many children (sitting here) who I can say would have received a beating from their teachers and parents when they had done something wrong.... The government is also run like this, whenever any official does something wrong he is punished", Akhilesh, who has justified the suspension of Nagpal, a 2010-batch officer, said at a function.

In Delhi, SP leader Ram Gopal Yadav struck a defiant note. "If the Centre wants to intervene, it can remove all the IAS officers from Uttar Pradesh. We will run the state with our own officers," he said.

Minister of State for Personnel V Narayanasamy said that under the rules, the suspended officer has the right to appeal.

"She has not approached us so far. But if she sends her appeal to us, we will send its copy to the state government and seek its response. Then we will decide the future course of action. Normally, an officer approaches the state government... We cannot act suo moto," he said.

Nagpal, the 28-year-old SDM of Gautam Budh Nagar, who led the crackdown on sand mining mafia in her district, was suspended on July 27 ostensibly for ordering demolition of a wall of a under-construction mosque allegedly without following the due process.

Nagpal, who belongs to the UP cadre, was chargesheeted on Sunday.

Asked about the suspension issue outside Parliament, the Prime Minister said, "We are in touch with the state government to find out the full details of the issue."

"There are rules laid down and the rules will be followed," he said.

Official sources said Centre is examining a report sent to it by the UP government on the suspension issue.

A report carrying details of the suspension has been received by the Ministry of Personnel, which is the nodal authority for administrative matters related to Indian Administrative Service (IAS), they said.

The report was sent after the Centre issued three letters to the state government and a week after the officer was suspended.

The Centre had yesterday asked the UP government to immediately give a report on the suspension of Nagpal, who had cracked down on sand mafia in Gautam Budh Nagar area.

Minister of State for Personnel V Narayanasamy said this is the third such letter sent to the state government after she was suspended on July 27.

The Centre's fresh reminder came in the backdrop of Sonia Gandhi, who is Chairperson of National Advisory Council (NAC), writing a letter to the Prime Minister, saying that Nagpal should not be "unfairly treated".

As per rules, an officer gets a maximum of ten days to respond on charges levelled against him or her.

At another function at the Samajwadi Party office in Lucknow, the Chief Minister justified the decision to suspend Nagpal, saying a number of SDMs have been suspended in the country and asked why such a hue and cry was being raised on such action in UP.

"A number of SDMs might have been suspended in the country...But why hue and cry is being raised on suspension in the state..Media is after my government," Akhilesh said.

Akhilesh said in the previous Mayawati regime, an IAS officer had committed suicide and they (IAS officers) used to visit CM's office after removing shoes.

SP's arch rival and BSP supremo Mayawati used the suspension row to lash out at the state government. "A lot of injustice has been done to the IAS officer who has been suspended and chargesheeted," she said.

"There is no law and order in the state. Instead, it is ruled by mafia and anti-social elements....It has drastically failed in matters of law and order," she said. (PTI)

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