

# 'I haven't given up on counter-terrorism agency'

*Home Minister in an exclusive interview with Editorial Director Prabhu Chawla and Special Correspondent Manan Kumar*

AFP PHOTO/RAVEENDRAN



**New Delhi:** Asserting he has not given up on the National Counter-Terrorism Centre (NCTC) because "it is my proposal", Home Minister P Chidambaram has defended the government's Universal Identity Card (UID) plan against criticisms of adding another agency when existing institutions could have done the job. "The Registrar General's hands are already full... The Election Commission card is only for the purpose of voting. It is an identity card for voting, we should not mix that up with gathering of biometric data and issuing a unique identity number which will then be loaded on various applications... It is a specialised function. We, therefore, have created a specialised agency which can give the number. See, more children will be born, more people will attain the age of majority. So this UID is a continuing function... Numbers have to be given... People will die, the number has to be eliminated. So the UID exercise is a continuing exercise, it is not a one-time exercise."

Answering a question on Pakistan's role in 26/11 and its cooperation in the ongoing probe, Chidambaram describes the Pakistan response as unsatisfactory. "They have cited 160 witnesses, they have not examined one, three judges have been changed, they have arrested some people but we think that the real culprits have not been arrested." Saying India does not know where the four Pakistan residents named in the latest US chargesheet on the attack, Chidambaram says reaching any conclusion in the case is not possible till India has access to questioning a number of people in Pakistan. Refraining from comment on US statements and actions, the home minister also believes there is no contradiction on continuing the Indo-Pak peace process. "We continue to press them

on 26/11, we continue to work towards improving relations," he says.

Explaining the perceived shift in his approach to the Naxal problem, from leading the states in the battle to putting the onus back on them, Chidambaram says, "From day one we have said the primary responsibility for fighting militants or fighting insurgents lies with the state governments, and that we are here to help them by providing paramilitary forces, training, intelligence and equipment." And it's no easy task for chief ministers, says the home minister. "It is only when you are sitting in the chief minister's chair, when you have to tackle Naxals, when you have to ensure that human rights of ordinary people are

**'The responsibility for fighting militants lies with the state governments.'**

not violated, when you have to protect villagers caught in the crossfire between security forces and the Naxals, when you have to respond to the charges made by civil society organisations, when you have to answer cases filed in the courts, when all these dimensions have to be taken into account you will know how difficult is the job that the chief ministers are doing. It is very easy for us to sit in an armchair and pronounce a chief minister or a government as a failure."

On his attacking West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya on the same issue, Chidambaram says: "I criticised him only on one issue, namely, on the CPI(M) cadres who are indulging in violence. I gave him evidence for that." What about their accusations that he had wrongly revealed certain information? "They can make whatever accusations they want to make. Why should I answer accusations?"

To the home ministry's liberal attitude

in granting permission for telephone tapping, Chidambaram says: "Such requests don't come to me. They are dealt with by the home secretary. We are equally concerned about its misuse by unauthorised persons. I am all for protective privacy. The whole issue of phone tapping is being addressed by a Committee under the Cabinet Secretary. Let us wait for its report."

Asked what he thought about the Prime Minister and higher judiciary coming under purview of the proposed Lokpal, Chidambaram, who is a member of the drafting committee, says: "The personal view of a member or a minister on the drafting committee is not important. As drafting committee, we have to come to a view... we have to accommodate views of civil society also. So, it is in the drafting committee that the pros and cons of each proposal will have to be discussed and a view taken." But what about the pressure on the government to include members from civil society? "I don't think the committee was formed under pressure from civil society," says Chidambaram.

"There was already the National Advisory Council (NAC) which had almost completed its work on drafting a Lokpal Bill. You saw that from the letter which Mrs Gandhi wrote to Anna Hazare. It had almost completed its work and they had consulted Mr Shanti Bhushan, they had consulted Mr Anna Hazare himself. Anyway, a situation arose where a joint drafting committee had to be formed, so government decided that a joint drafting committee be formed. Don't see it as an example of acting under pressure. NAC also has civil society members. Therefore, instead of the NAC taking up the drafting, the joint drafting committee is taking up the drafting."