

9,000 orders for phone interception a month: Govt

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ON an average, the Union Home Ministry orders 250-300 telephone interceptions every day.

In response to an RTI application by *The Indian Express*, the Home Ministry has stated: "On an average, between 7,500 and 9,000 orders for interception of telephones are issued by the Central government per month." According to the Indian Telegraph Rules, the Union Home Secretary is the authority to grant approval for interception of telephones.

Under Section 5(2) of the Indian Telegraph Act, telephonic

conversations can be intercepted/monitored inter alia on grounds of sovereignty and integrity of India, security of the State, relations with foreign states or public order or for preventing incitement to commission of an offence.

Once cleared, the interceptions can be continued for two months and may be renewed twice. In any case, the interception cannot be in force more than 180 days.

The Home Ministry, in its response to the RTI application, did not divulge details saying records pertaining to these interceptions are destroyed after six months, unless these are, or likely to be, required for functional re-

quirements. The agencies which get clearance for interception of telephones include law enforcement agencies functioning under the Central government.

Telephone interceptions are cleared as per Rule 419-A of the Indian Telegraph Rules. But these are not the only phones which are being intercepted. In fact, state governments have similar powers to intercept phones. In their case, requests for interception are cleared by the Secretary of Home Department.

The Centre and state governments are supposed to put these interceptions before a review committee headed by the Cabinet Secretary in case of the Centre, and by the Chief Secretary in case of the state.

