

Turkey labels YouTube leak a pre-election 'plot'

ANKARA, TURKEY: Turkey vowed action on Friday against the source of a bugged recording of a security meeting on Syria leaked on YouTube, labelling it a conspiratorial "plot" ahead of key local elections.



Prime Minister of Turkey,
Recep Tayyip Erdogan.
(Attribution: Gobierno de Chile)

"Such a cyber attack in a meeting in which military and security options are being discussed is no different than a military attack," charged Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, as prosecutors launched a probe into the eavesdropping.

"We will take action against those who want to throw Turkey into chaos with political plotting," said Davutoglu, one of the purported figures heard in the recording of the high-level meeting.

The social media release of the audio file was the latest targeting Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's government after a spate of other leaked recordings indicated a vast corruption scandal.

The Erdogan government, which last week shut down Twitter, ordered a block on YouTube Thursday over the latest release, sparking more criticism from foreign capitals and human rights groups.

In the latest audio file, purportedly of high-level government, military and intelligence officials, participants are heard discussing plans to establish a cause for military strikes in neighbouring Syria.

The government did not deny the meeting took place but said some content had been manipulated.

Davutoglu said that "these revelations have only benefited the regime" in Syria.

Officials have searched the site of the talks, the foreign ministry building in Ankara, for listening devices, said Davutoglu.

"There is a clear attack against national security," said Davutoglu in a national TV interview, adding that YouTube was shut down after it had refused a government request to take down the account in question.

"This is not freedom of thought. This is a security threat. A state is entitled to take measures," said Davutoglu.

The local elections that took place yesterday, Sunday are seen as a bellwether of the popularity of Erdogan, who has ruled Turkey for 11 years, ahead of Turkey's first direct presidential election in August and parliamentary polls scheduled for next year.

Erdogan, long hailed at home and abroad for driving rapid economic growth, has drawn criticism since last June when a harsh police crackdown on protesters left eight people dead and thousands injured.

At a campaign rally Thursday, three days before the municipal vote, Erdogan angrily condemned the YouTube leak as "a vile, cowardly, immoral act" and warned his political foes that "we will go into their caves".

He has repeatedly accused his ally-turned-foe Fethullah Gulen, an influential Muslim cleric in self-imposed US exile, of masterminding the leaks and a graft probe to drive him from power.

The premier has charged that followers of the Gulen Movement inside the Turkish police and judicial apparatus form a parallel, or "deep state" and are behind the wire-tapping of thousands of prominent figures.

Despite the YouTube ban ordered by the Turkish Telecommunications regulator TIB, the platform remained accessible to many users in Turkey by Friday morning.

YouTube was previously banned for two years until 2010 because of material deemed insulting to the country's revered founding father Mustafa Kemal Ataturk.

The Twitter ban, meanwhile, was officially revoked by an Ankara court this week.

Use of the microblogging site actually rose after the official ban, which many users circumvented by accessing Twitter via text messaging from their smartphones or using so-called virtual private networks.

The foreign minister said on Friday that "Twitter is not the guardian of freedom. In the end, it is just a company. And it has to abide by the orders of Turkish courts."

Source: AFP, via I-Net Bridge