

Brazil's Scandal du Jour: National Election Board Gets Phones Bugged

Contributed by Francesco Neves
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The president of Brazil's National Election Board (TSE), minister Marco Aurélio Mello, is mad as hell after finding out that his telephone as well as those of two other ministers who work with him were bugged.

"This is worrisome and shows the situation we are living in," said Mello, adding that such behavior was deplorable. "We have an almost psychedelic situation with scandals bursting forth day in and day out. When we think everything has already happened something else comes up and we are left perplexed",

Mello ended up infuriating Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula when he hinted that the government might be behind the eavesdropping: "If this action was done by a private person, a politician or by organized crime, it is reprehensible. But if it came from the state this would show the situation of horror and oppression that we are experiencing."

You can't imagine a minister of the Supreme court being snooped at, Mello told reporters, adding: "As far I am concerned I can assure one thing: whoever decided to bug me must be frustrated because I am an open book."

Márcio Thomaz Bastos, Brazil's Justice Minister, vowed that the federal police is going to open an inquiry to find out who is responsible for tapping the phones of the supreme electoral authority in the country in the eve of national elections, which are scheduled for October 1st, a Sunday.

"We expect that this crime will be solved quickly", said the minister. But some experts have already said that it would be very hard to find out the buggers.

A routine bug sweep found wiretaps in the TSE president's phone, the court's vice president Antonio Cezar Peluso, and at minister Marcelo Ribeiro's telephone. Ribeiro is the one in charge of taking electoral ads off the air when they violate electoral laws.

For nine years sweeps were being done once a month at the TSE by the Fence company and nothing wrong had been detected until now. From now on they'll occur every week at least until the end of October when all elections, first and second rounds, will be finished.

The TSE is the highest authority on elections in Brazil. There are also 27 Electoral Regional Boards, one for each state plus one for the Federal District, Brasília. Electoral registries deal with local electoral issues.

Since the TSE does not have its own cadre, the top positions in the high court (seven at least) are filled up by three judges from the Supreme Court (STF), plus two judges from the Superior Justice Tribunal (STJ) (an appellate court), besides two lawyers nominated by the STF and chosen by the President of the Republic.