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WINTER SESSION : Lower House passes SPG Amendment Bill by voice vote

Rahul violated SPG norms 1,892 times: Shah

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NEW DELHI, DHNS

Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday said the security of the Congress' acting president Sonia Gandhi, her son Rahul Gandhi and daughter Priyanka Gandhi has not been withdrawn but replaced with the second-highest security cover after the SPG on the basis of "a professional assessment" of security threats to them.

While replying to a debate in the Lok Sabha on a bill that seeks to amend the Special Protection Group (SPG) Act, he said the government has now provided them with the Z-plus security, which also includes advanced security liaison (ASL) and ambulance and there is "no vindictiveness or political vendetta" behind it.

Pointing out that the SPG was originally formed with the sole purpose of providing close proximity protection to the prime minister and his family members staying with him or her, the home minister trained guns at the Congress telling it that the Act was amended several times in past keeping "just one family" in mind.

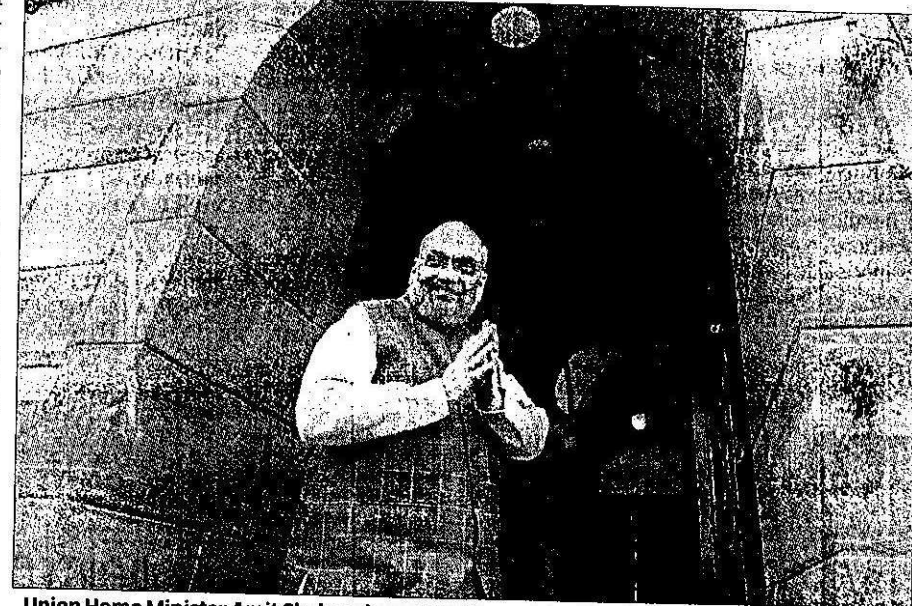
He also told the Lok Sabha that Sonia, Rahul and Priyanka, while being under the protection of the SPG, violated the security protocol and attended a number of events without giving prior information to their security.

Shah told the members that Rahul travelled 1,892 times within India without informing the SPG and went abroad on 247 occasions without SPG cover since 2015, while Priyanka travelled 339 times in Delhi without any information to the SPG and 64 times in different parts of the country. She travelled abroad for 99 times but took SPG security cover 21 times only.

Sonia travelled in Delhi without informing the SPG on more than 50 occasions. She also travelled without a bullet-proof vehicle on 13 occasions and went abroad 29 times without informing the SPG, he said.

"One (protectee) rides an expensive bike at 100 km/hr in Lutyens' Delhi. Security cars are left behind. Now, what can I say officially about this," Shah added.

The SPG (Protection) Amendment Bill was passed by the Lok Sabha by voice votes



Union Home Minister Amit Shah arrives at Parliament to attend the ongoing Winter Session, in New Delhi, Wednesday. PTI

after members debated its provisions and those from the Congress and some other Opposition parties demanded that government should withdraw the bill, accusing the Modi government of playing "vendetta politics."

Congress members joined by those of DMK, Left parties

staged a walkout while the Bill was being passed.

Congress member Manish Tewari sought to link the withdrawal of SPG cover with Rajiv Gandhi assassination, recalling how his security cover was withdrawn despite intelligence agencies flagging the increasing security threat to him.

Shah lashed out at the Congress for making an "unnecessary hue and cry" over the issue, asking why did not they make "similar hue and cry" when the SPG security of the former prime ministers Manmohan Singh, Chandrashekar, Narshimha Rao and I.K. Gujral was withdrawn.