

Pak civilian, military top brass knew about Osama's presence: Ex- Pak minister

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New Delhi: Pakistan's top civilian and military leadership knew about Osama bin Laden's presence in the country much before the US Navy SEALs killed him in a raid in 2011, the then defence minister of Pakistan has claimed.

The Pakistani establishment, the country's powerful army chief and the intelligence agency ISI were aware that Osama was living in Abbottabad, according to Chaudhry Ahmad Mukhtar, who was Pakistan's defence minister between 2008 and 2012.

Former Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari, then army chief Ashfaq Parvez Kayani and joint chief of staff all knew that Osama was in Pakistan, Mukhtar told an English news channel.

The former defence minister's admissions are contrary to what Pakistan has been claiming so far that it was unaware of Osama's presence in the country until the US Navy SEALs killed him in a daring raid in May 2011.

Asked if President Zardari and General Kayani had information about Osama and were there people both in the civilian and military chain of command who had prior information, Mukhtar answered in the affirmative.

Asked if they had prior information in terms of suspicion of the location of the world's most wanted man, Mukhtar said, "Some people knew, people in the Pakistan army as well as people in the other forces they also knew it and they were on the lookout for somebody of the stature of Osama bin Laden."

Mukhtar's admissions come on the heels of investigative reporter Seymour Hersh's claim that a Pakistani agent had leaked to the US Osama's Abbottabad hideout address.

Osama was killed in Abbottabad on May 2, 2011 in a raid by the US Navy SEALs.

- PTI