

# Threatening calls have no political link, police say

**PINOLE: Chairman of local Democratic party said he received death threats in connection with opposition to recall effort**

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**By Tom Lochner**

**B**erkeley police say threatening phone calls reported by an East Bay political leader do not appear connected to political activity.

Contra Costa County Democratic Party Chairman Nagaraja Rao told the Pinole City Council last month that he received several death threats Nov. 17 in connection with his and the party's central committee's opposition to a recall of Pinole Councilwoman Maria Alegria and Councilman Stephen Tilton.

Rao said he was in Berkeley when he received the first of the calls, on the morning that a report on the party action appeared in the Times. He said the timing of the calls left no doubt that they were related to his and the party's stand, though he said callers did not specifically mention the recall.

"There is nothing so far that would show that the calls were connected to any political activity whatsoever," Berkeley police Lt. Wes Hester said Thursday. The investigation is continuing, he said.

"We are grateful to Berkeley police for investigating and concluding that so far these calls do not appear to be related to any political action, let alone the Pinole recall," said Jeff Rubin of recall sponsor Concerned Citizens of Pinole. "Until the investigation is concluded, we will have nothing more to say in the matter."

Rao is out of the country until at least January, said Cecilia Valdez, the party's vice chairwoman.

She said the police statement, as read to her, means "they're not able to connect" the phone threats to the Pinole recall.

"It could or could not be connected; I can't discount it," Valdez said, adding that until the days after the party's recall stance, Rao had never reported any death threats. "I can't say that it is or isn't connected," she said. "People will have to draw their own conclusions."

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