

Some Indian troops to remain on Pakistan border: Fernandes

AFP, New Delhi

Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes Wednesday said troops will maintain some forward positions along the frontier with Pakistan to prevent thousands of Islamic rebels from crossing.

"Whatever (withdrawal) had to be done has been done. For strategic reasons, some of the forward positions that we have, we will maintain," Fernandes told reporters on the icy heights of the Siachen glacier in north Kashmir, the world's highest manned frontier.

Fernandes, quoted by the Press Trust of India (PTI) news agency, said at any given time up to 3,000

infiltrators were waiting to cross into Indian territory, showing Pakistan still supported "cross-border terrorism."

But Fernandes said day-to-day firing across the disputed Kashmir border had decreased significantly, PTI reported. He said India was carefully demining forward areas and had already lost about 80 personnel in the process.

India sent thousands of troops to its borders with Pakistan following an attack on the Indian parliament last December 13. New Delhi announced October 16 it would pull back troops after elections in its zone of Kashmir.

The Indian pullback, however,

pertained only to mutually-recognised borders and not to the de facto frontier in Kashmir, which is divided and bitterly disputed between India and Pakistan.

"After December 13, a situation was created where we had to deploy our forces in full strength. We have achieved our objective of their deployment with the successful conduct of elections in Jammu and Kashmir," Fernandes said.

India says Pakistan funds, arms and trains rebels fighting since 1989 to end Indian rule in Kashmir, its sole Muslim-majority state. Pakistan says it only provides moral and diplomatic support to an "indigenous" movement.



A crowd of Kashmiri Muslim men shout anti India slogans as they carry the body of a Muslim man in Gopalgpora in the outskirts of Srinagar on Thursday after unidentified gunmen overnight killed the man and his two sons. More than 37,500 people have died in Indian Kashmir since an anti-India rebellion erupted in the Himalayan region in 1989.

3 killed in grenade attack on Pak church

Cleric among 4 detained

AP, Lahore

Police detained four people, including a Muslim cleric who allegedly urged his followers to kill Christians, after a Christmas Day grenade attack on a Pakistani church that killed three young girls and wounded 13 other people.

Two assailants covered in burqas, the all-encompassing garment worn by women in some Islamic countries, tossed a grenade into the middle of worshippers at a Christmas Day service Wednesday in Chianwala, about 40 miles northwest of Lahore.

The cleric, who uses only the one name, Afzar, was being detained because of hateful remarks toward Christians made three days earlier in a sermon at a mosque in the district of Daska, where Chianwala is located, police said. Authorities say they have no evidence yet that he was directly involved in the attack.

Afzar's son, Attallah, was also detained for questioning. The two are open supporters of the banned group Jaish-e-Mohammed, a violent anti-India organisation with ties to the al-Qaeda terrorist network, said a police officer in Chianwala, Mohammed Riaz.

Riaz said the two are believed to have undergone training at a Jaish-e-Mohammed camp.

Another two people also are being detained by police in Chianwala in connection with the grenade attack on the church, but it was not known whether they too had links to the group, which was outlawed in Pakistan last January.

US scores win in India against ICC

AFP, New Delhi

India and the United States signed a pact Thursday under which they agreed not to send each other's nationals to a world tribunal, in a victory for Washington's efforts to scuttle the International Criminal Court.

At least 14 other countries have already signed such agreements with the United States, but India is significant as most of the others are small or closely identified as US allies.

The US-India agreement states there will be "non-extradition of nationals of either country to any international tribunal without the other country's express consent."

It was signed by Indian Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal, the top bureaucrat in the foreign ministry, and the US ambassador to India, Robert Blackwill.

"India and the United States share the strongest possible commitment to bringing to justice those who commit war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide," Blackwill told reporters after the

signing.

"However, we are concerned about the International Criminal Court (ICC) treaty with respect to the adequacy of checks and balances, the impact of the treaty on national sovereignty and the potential for conflict with the UN Charter," he said.

US President George W. Bush's administration strongly opposes the ICC, saying the tribunal could bring politically motivated charges against Americans, including civilian military contractors and former officials.

The Rome statute setting up the ICC was signed by US president Bill Clinton, but he urged his successor not to ratify participation in the court until Washington resolved its concerns.

India has neither signed nor ratified the ICC. Nonetheless, a total of 139 countries have signed the Rome statute and 87 have ratified it, according to non-governmental organisations.

The ICC enjoys support of many US allies, particularly in Europe and it officially opened in The Hague in July. Eighteen judges are expected

to be elected to the world's first permanent international court in February.

The court theoretically has universal jurisdiction, but can only prosecute if the state where the crimes were committed or the state of the nationality of the accused are party to the statute.

Faced with the creation of the ICC, the United States has instead been trying to reach bilateral agreements under which countries will pledge not to extradite any US national to an international court.

Others that have signed non-extradition agreements with Washington are Afghanistan, the Dominican Republic, East Timor, El Salvador, Gambia, Honduras, Israel, the Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Micronesia, Palau, Romania, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

John Bolton, the US under secretary of state for arms control and international security, said November 14 that Washington was focusing its efforts on non-extradition with countries in South Asia and the Middle East.

Gunmen kill father, two sons in Kashmir

AFP, Srinagar

Suspected Islamic militants overnight killed a Muslim man and his two sons in Indian-administered Kashmir, a police spokesman said Thursday.

He said the gunmen barged into the home of Mohammed Shafi in Gopalgpora village in Budgam district late on Wednesday.

After an altercation with the inmates, the men opened fire, injuring Shafi and his two sons.

The three were taken to hospitals in Kashmir's summer capital Srinagar, where they succumbed to their injuries late Wednesday.

Police were investigating the killings.

5 Pak militants killed while crossing into Kashmir

AFP, Jammu

Five suspected Islamic rebels and an Indian soldier were killed Thursday as militants tried to enter the insurgency-ravaged Indian zone of Kashmir from Pakistani territory, officials said.

The rebels, who were equipped with assault rifles and ammunition, were killed at Mendhar in the Poonch district, about 225 km northwest of the Indian province's winter capital Jammu, a defence ministry spokesman said.

Five rebels were shot dead by the troops and one soldier also died in the gunbattle, the spokesman said.

Maoist rebels kill 7 in Bihar

AFP, Patna

Left-wing rebels killed seven people overnight in the impoverished eastern Indian state of Bihar, police said Thursday.

The assailants killed the low-caste farmers in Masaurhi town, 40 kilometres from the state capital Patna, deputy inspector general of police R.R. Prasad said.

He said the rebels belonged to the Sunil Tiger outfit, a breakaway faction of the leftist People's War Group which is fighting for farmers' rights and land redistribution in Bihar and neighbouring states.

Although the exact motive behind the killings is not known, police suspect they might be related to extortion demands by the rebel group.

N Korea moves fuel rods into N-reactor

Pyongyang 'aggravating' nuke crisis: Kim

AP, Seoul

North Korea has begun moving fresh fuel rods into a mothballed nuclear reactor at the centre of a diplomatic standoff with the United States, deepening concerns it is preparing to restart facilities that experts say could produce nuclear weapons within months.

North Korea denied its move was a prelude to developing weapons, saying it needed to reactivate the facility to generate electricity.

"Our republic constantly maintains an anti-nuclear, peace-loving position," Radio Pyongyang said. The report was carried by South Korea's Yonhap news agency.

The communist nation began moving fuel rods Wednesday into the 5-megawatt reactor at its main nuclear complex in Yongbyon, 50 miles north of its capital, Pyongyang, said Chun Young-woo, director of the disarmament and nuclear energy division at South Korea's Foreign Ministry.

Chun did not say whether North Korea has actually begun loading fuel into the Soviet-designed reac-

tor. The move was apparently intended to ratchet up pressure on the United States and its allies, which recently cut off oil shipments to North Korea in response to revelations that it had been secretly developing nuclear weapons in violation of an eight-year-old agreement.

Chun cited information from the UN International Atomic Energy Agency, which has inspectors at the facility.

Earlier this month North Korea announced plans to restart its nuclear facilities, frozen under a 1994 agreement with the United States and its allies. It has removed UN monitoring equipment from the reactor and three other key nuclear facilities.

IAEA spokesman Mark Gwozdecky told the British Broadcasting Corp. that the nuclear watchdog's on-site monitors had seen the North Koreans move some 400 fresh fuel rods on Wednesday.

The agency has three inspectors in North Korea who are watching the activities at the nuclear facilities. The number of inspectors was

increased from two to three this week.

The reactor and three other North Korean nuclear facilities were sealed under the 1994 agreement, which required Pyongyang to freeze its nuclear program in exchange for energy sources provided by the United States and its allies.

AFP adds: South Korea President Kim Dae-Jung accused North Korea Thursday of "aggravating" a nuclear crisis as the foreign ministry confirmed that Pyongyang had begun moving fuel rods to a reactor capable of producing weapons-grade plutonium.

Kim, chairing an urgent national security meeting at the presidential Blue House, condemned the North's steps to reactivate a nuclear programme at Yongbyon, 90 km north of Pyongyang.

"Despite the international community's efforts for a peaceful resolution of the nuclear issue, North Korea moved to restart frozen nuclear facilities, further aggravating the situation," Kim was quoted as telling officials at the meeting.

2 die of injuries after Christmas Day blasts in India

AFP, Guwahati

Two people, including a five-year-old girl, have died of injuries they suffered when blasts rocked a crowded street on Christmas near the archbishop's residence in the northeastern Indian state of Assam, officials said Thursday.

Three simultaneous mortar blasts hit the street packed with Christmas revellers on Wednesday night. Police said two people died of their injuries while 20 others were wounded, including a former member of the Indian parliament, Prabin Sharma.

No group has claimed responsibility for the attack, but officials said it could have been the work of tribal rebels active in the state.

Kashmir CM asks rebels to give up arms

AFP, Srinagar

The new leader of Indian-administered Kashmir Wednesday asked Muslim militants to abandon violence, in what appeared to be a step back from earlier calls for unconditional talks with rebels.

Chief Minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed in a statement "asked militants to drop (the) gun and shun violence as the government is pursuing the policy of unconditional dialogue."

But analysts said Sayeed's appeal seemed to set a condition for talks, marking a change in his stance.

Sayeed's People's Democratic Party (PDP) made major gains in September-October elections on promises to start unconditional talks between rebels and New Delhi as part of a "healing touch" to wind down Kashmir's 13-year separatist insurgency.

Netaji against partition of India

PTI, New Delhi

A new book on the Indian National Army says Subhash Chandra Bose and his comrades in the INA never believed in the partition of India.

Brig R P Singh (Retd), author of the Book Rediscovering Bose and Indian National Army, says only a few politicians of the Muslim League, the Congress and the British bureaucracy created a situation whereby the partition of India became inevitable.

Stating that many people believed Bose could have helped to stop the partition of the country, the author quotes Anita Bose, daughter of Subhash Bose as saying "I think Muslim leaders trusted my father more than they trusted Nehru or other Hindu leaders, so there might have been a better basis for working together".

Pakistan informed US of 'personal' nuclear tech transfer

AFP, Tokyo

Pakistan has secretly informed the United States that a number of its scientists and military officers were "personally" involved in providing nuclear arms technology to North Korea, Japanese media reported Wednesday.

The information was passed on about two years ago in response to a US request for probes into Pakistan's suspected transfer of nuclear arms technology to the hardline communist state, Jiji Press news agency said.

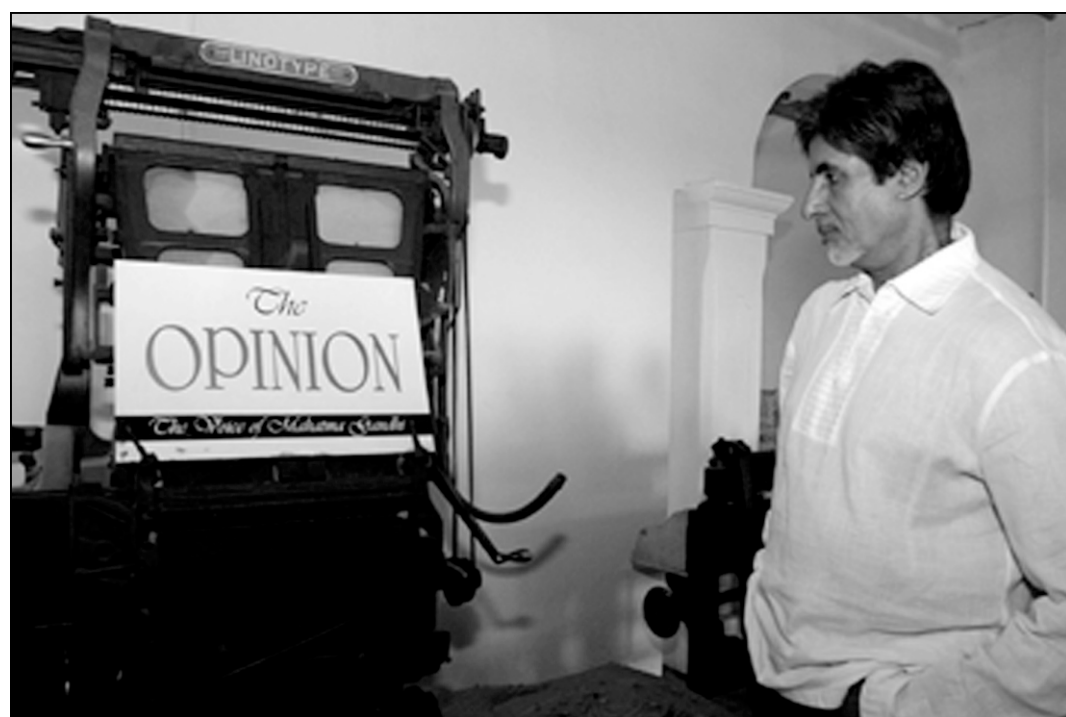


PHOTO: AFP

Bollywood and Indian Film legend Amitabh Bachchan visits on Wednesday the home and the printing press of the Father of the Indian freedom struggle Mahatma Gandhi in Bhambayi some 38 km north of Durban. Mahatma Gandhi spent 21 years of his early life in the country and published the "The Opinion" newspaper in 1903 expressing the voice of the Indian community. Mahatma Gandhi's home was re-built in 1992 after political violence destroyed his home in 1985. Bachchan is touring South Africa to promote the "Now or Never" musical concert involving ten other major top stars billed to entertain thousands of fans on 30th December. The budget for the one night show is approximately three million US dollars and is said to be the biggest ever staged outside the Indian sub-continent as South Africa has the largest Indian population outside of India.

Most Nepalese support multi-party system: Poll

AFP, Kathmandu

Nearly three-quarters of Nepalese favour a multi-party democracy and only one in 10 supports a communist state as advocated by Maoist rebels, according to a poll released Wednesday.

In the wake of King Gyanendra's dissolution of the government and proposals to hold party-less elections, some 73 percent of Nepalese still support the multi-party system, said the survey by the Centre for Economic and Social Development, a Kathmandu-based non-governmental organisation.

"The majority of the Nepalese people preferred a multiparty system of government but want reforms in the governance," the study said.

It said the poll was taken of 4,000 people in six of Nepal's 75 districts that were found to be representative.

The survey said 11 percent of Nepalese wanted a single-party system, nine percent a Maoist state and three percent a military regime.

The Maoists have been waging a bloody insurrection since 1996 that has claimed more than 7,300 lives, according to security forces' figures.

The king on October 4 dismissed the elected prime minister, Sher Bahadur Deuba, calling him "incompetent", and replaced him with a staunch royalist, Lokendra Bahadur Chand, who will head the government until new elections are held.

However, no date has been set for parliamentary polls.

Chand's home minister, Dharma Bahadur Thapa, infuriated political parties this week when he proposed some 200,000 local council positions, which have been vacant since July, be decided in non-partisan elections.

Nepal's king ruled absolute from 1960 to 1990, with national parliamentarians forbidden from party affiliations.

BJP preparing for polls in 9 states: Venkaiah

PTI, Hyderabad

After the resounding success in Gujarat, the BJP was preparing to face elections in nine states due early next year with the same spirit which enthused its cadre to replicate similar results, BJP President Venkaiah Naidu said on Thursday.

"The concerted efforts of our cadre, leadership and professional management of campaign was the success of BJP in Gujarat and we would adopt the same line in other states going to polls early next year," Naidu told reporters in Hyderabad.

Reiterating BJP's "replicating of Gujarat experience" was being distorted by certain vested interests, Naidu, who was leaving for Vishkapatnam to address a state party meeting, said, "We only want to replicate the methodology

of coordination and better management of party affairs."

Naidu's defensive posture comes after his remark that Gujarat experience would be replicated in other states has drawn flak from various quarters.

When asked why the issue had been coming up frequently, Naidu said, "Certain undesirable events like groupism and differences have crept even into our party and this message was aimed at our cadre to fight unitedly as was done in Gujarat but the entire issue was being distorted."

Reiterating that there would be no deviation from NDA agenda as the mandate was in favour of coalition, Naidu said BJP will not thrust its ideology on allies but instead will try to expand the party base in the coming elections to secure a majority on our own.



PHOTO: AFP

Passengers travel in a metro train during its opening to the public in New Delhi on Wednesday. New Delhi opened the first section of its metro system, which authorities hope will clean up the congested and heavily polluted Indian capital.