

'India has no truce plans with Kashmiri militants'

Rival factions of JKLF to merge

AFP, PTI, Srinagar/ London

The Indian army has no plans for a ceasefire with Islamic militants in the divided Himalayan state of Kashmir but is ready to encourage them to give up arms, India's army chief said yesterday.

"There is no such idea," General J.J. Singh said when asked by reporters about the possibility of a ceasefire in Kashmir.

"The army is ready to help those Kashmiri youth who want to shun violence," he said.

India has more than 400,000 security personnel in Kashmir including soldiers and paramilitary units, according to estimates from defence analysts.

The troops focus most of their efforts on stopping militants from the Pakistan-controlled zone of the state from crossing the ceasefire Line of Control as well as fighting a home-grown insurgency in the Kashmir Valley.

There have been persistent calls for a truce with militants by Kashmiri state politicians following progress in an 18-month old peace process

between India and Pakistan.

The Indian army entered a ceasefire with militant groups in July 2000 that lasted two weeks. The army followed the aborted agreement with a unilateral halt to operations in November 2000 that lasted six months.

In November 2004, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh announced a unilateral withdrawal of several thousand troops from Kashmir.

Pakistan and India in April resumed a bus service between the divided zones of Kashmir after a gap of nearly 60 years and have been observing a ceasefire on the Line of Control for more than a year.

As well, India last week allowed moderate separatists to visit Pakistan and its portion of Kashmir to hold talks with militant and political leadership there.

However, Singh said the army intended to retain current strength to combat almost daily attacks by militants.

"They would be dealt with firmly," Singh said. "Our iron fist is ready for them."

Singh said despite the thaw in relations with Islamabad, over Kashmir, militants were making repeated attempts to cross into the Indian zone from the Pakistani zone.

"They (militants) are trying to infiltrate but we are continuously foiling their designs," the army chief said. "Every week there are one or two attempts."

Some (militants) get killed but, some pass through."

India accuses Pakistan of arming and funding Muslim rebels. Islamabad says it is doing its best to prevent infiltration of armed rebels into Indian side.

Both countries, which have fought two of their three wars over Kashmir, claim the region in full.

Thousands have died in Kashmir since the eruption of insurgency against Indian rule in the region in 1989.

PTI adds: The rival factions of Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front led by Amanullah Khan and Yasin Malik have decided to merge, a spokesman of the JKLF-Amanullah claimed in London.

The decision to merge was taken when Yasin Malik called on Amanullah Khan in Muzaffarabad in Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir. Zafar Khan, Spokesman and Chairman Diplomatic Committee of JKLF (Amanullah) said on Wednesday night.

Referring to the current talks between India and Pakistan, Khan said that JKLF would not accept geographical or communal division of Kashmir as a solution to the issue.

"We urge both India and Pakistan to adopt an inclusive and democratic approach on the issue of Kashmiri representation in the dialogue process over Kashmir."

On Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir, Khan said "while we consider the administration in Muzaffarabad interim and provision, we take strong exception that in some aspects of governance it is undemocratic and unrepresentative, and as such hardly reflects a democratic society."

He also urged Pakistan to remove Amanullah Khan's name from exit control list and allow him travel abroad freely.



PHOTO: AFP
Sri Lankan left wing activists and monks hold banners and placards as they take part in a demonstration in the suburb of Maharagama in Colombo yesterday.



Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas attends a meeting yesterday with militant factions in the Gaza Strip in a bid to prevent a truce from unravelling.

22 Iraqi soldiers kidnapped

Top EU officials visit Iraq, Rice opens door to talks with insurgents

AFP, AP, Baghdad

Twenty-two Iraqi soldiers were kidnapped near the Syrian border, an Iraqi military source said, as four US soldiers and 10 militants were killed in less than 24 hours in attacks north of the capital.

With no let-up in strikes against Iraq's fledgling security forces, senior Shia leader Abdul Aziz al-Hakim demanded Wednesday that the armed wing of his party play a greater role in hunting down insurgents, who have also singled out the country's majority Shia community for attacks.

The soldiers, all Shias, were nabbed by armed men in Rawah, about 250km west of Baghdad, after they had left their base, said the military source, adding that nothing

had been heard from them since.

Meanwhile, a top-level European Union delegation including British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw arrived in Baghdad yesterday to prepare for a conference on Iraqi reconstruction in Brussels this month, officials said.

"They will meet leaders of the new Iraqi government. The foreign secretary has met members of the government previously, but it will be a chance for him to see their work in Iraq," the Foreign Office in London said.

In Washington meanwhile US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice left the door open Wednesday for Iraqi officials to negotiate with groups linked to the insurgency, saying political reconciliation must be an Iraqi process.

German court orders acquittal of Sept 11 attack suspect

AFP, Karlsruhe

Germany's federal appeal court yesterday ordered the acquittal of a Moroccan student, Abdelghani Mzoudi, who was accused of involvement in the September 11, 2001, attacks.

Mzoudi, 32, had been tried in Hamburg in 2003 but his trial collapsed.

The appeals court rejected an appeal from federal prosecutors for a new trial, citing a lack of evidence.

The court therefore confirmed the judgement of the Hamburg appeals court which acquitted Mzoudi in February 2004.

Mzoudi lives in Hamburg, the northern German port city which was one of the planning nerve centres of the suicide plane attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon which killed around 3,000 people.

UNSC contenders ready to forgo veto for 15-yr

PTI, United Nations

In a surprise move, India and other G-4 nations have proposed not to exercise the veto right for 15 years in a new draft resolution seeking expansion of the 15-member UN Security Council by addition of six permanent and four nonpermanent members circulated.

The draft, which emerged from weeks of discussions, keeps the principle of veto for the new permanent members intact but they would not exercise it until the question of its extension has been decided by a review conference 15 years after the amendments to Charter giving effect to the recommendations in the resolution come into force.

In effect, the new permanent members would not have veto right for at least first 15 years after taking their place.

Replying to questions, Indian UN Ambassador Nirupam Sen said

the amended draft has not been diluted so far as veto is concerned as it keeps the principle intact. During the 15 years, member states would have the time to judge the contribution made by new permanent members and then decide whether that right should be extended to them.

Diplomats of Pakistan and Italy led "Uniting For Consensus" group, which are opposing the G-4, and China were taken by surprise as India, Japan, Brazil and Germany had on Tuesday said they were postponing the draft circulation under pressure from the US and opposition from Beijing.

Some 160-member states attended the meeting where the draft was presented but Pakistan, Italy and Mexico, as also China were conspicuous by their absence.

Also, in a major victory for the G-4, France has agreed to co-sponsor the resolution.

North Korea boasts it has more bombs

AP, Seoul

North Korea boasted it was building more nuclear bombs ahead of the South Korean leader's trip to Washington to discuss deadlocked international efforts to get the communist state to disarm.

The North is widely believed to have enough weapons-grade plutonium for a half-dozen nuclear bombs. Asked by ABC News if the North was building more, Vice Foreign Minister Kim Gye Gwan said: "Yes."

"As for specifically how many we have, that is a secret," he said.

Kim also implied the North was able to mount nuclear warheads on its missiles. "Our scientists have the knowledge, comparable to other scientists around the world," he said.

South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun traveled to Washington Thursday on a one-day whirlwind trip to meet President Bush amid signs of strain in the US-South Korean alliance over the nuclear standoff with North Korea.

Friday's meeting comes as international disarmament have floundered for nearly a year. The North has stayed away, citing "hostile" US policies and boasting it has nuclear weapons.

US officials claimed this week to have made progress in talks with North Korean officials in New York and said Pyongyang expressed its commitment to the arms talks, which also include China, Japan and Russia. However, no date was set for the negotiations to restart, and the South treated the development with scepticism.

Roh and Bush have deeply divergent views on dealing with North Korea.

While the United States views the North as a rogue regime at risk of proliferating weapons of mass destruction, the South is trying to coexist peacefully with its communist neighbour, said Peter Beck, Seoul-based director of the North East Asia Project for the International Crisis Group.



PHOTO: AFP

Luxembourg Foreign Minister Jean Asselborn (L) whose country currently holds the rotating EU presidency looks on as British Foreign Minister Jack Straw adjusts his sunglasses while Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari (R) says goodbye to foreign policy chief Javier Solana in Baghdad's fortified 'Green Zone' following a meeting yesterday.

TSUNAMI AID DEAL

JVP threatens to quit Lankan coalition govt

AFP, Colombo

A key member of Sri Lanka's ruling coalition yesterday announced a stepped-up campaign to force President Chandrika Kumaratunga to withdraw a tsunami aid-sharing deal with Tamil Tiger rebels, as a sit-down protest by Buddhist monks entered its second day.

The Marxist JVP, or People's Liberation Front, said it will stage a public rally in Colombo next Tuesday.

"The JVP has organised a massive protest campaign under the theme 'withdraw joint mechanism which sacrifices the official state of the government to Tiger terrorists,'" party spokesman Wimal Weerawansa said.

The JVP has vowed to sacrifice the 14-month-old coalition government if Kumaratunga goes ahead with her proposed joint mechanism with the rebel Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE).

Kumaratunga, for her part, has vowed to implement her deal despite threats to her life. Any pullout by the JVP could lead to the collapse of her administration.

More saffron-robed monks entered a sit-down demonstration outside the main railway station in the capital on the second day Thursday, with organisers saying

they will escalate the protest into a fast until death from Friday.

Kumaratunga's critics say the plan to jointly distribute international tsunami relief aid with the Tamil Tigers will help legitimise the rebels' separatist campaign.

The JVP's Weerawansa told parliament Wednesday that the decision to enter into a deal with the Tigers had been taken by Kumaratunga without consulting coalition partners.

"The country needs a government to defeat separatism, not to nourish it," Weerawansa said. "In the next few days we will announce our decision to save the country first. The government comes later."

Weerawansa, a Islammed Kumaratunga's "dictatorial attitude" and vowed to defeat her moves even as she herself pledged to press ahead with the proposed plan that has been widely endorsed by the international donor community.

The JVP argues that the proposed deal with the Tigers could be a stepping stone for a separate state the guerrillas have sought for decades.

Kumaratunga's government has a five-seat majority in the 225-member parliament and depends on the 39 votes of the JVP.

HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH SAYS

Forced displacement of civilians on in Myanmar

AFP, Bangkok

Myanmar's army continues to target civilians while fighting ethnic Karen rebels, with extrajudicial killings and forcible displacements of some people up to 100 times in their lives, Human Rights Watch said yesterday.

Sexual violence, forced labour and looting of villages are common practice for an "unreformed and unaccountable" Myanmar army, US-based Human Rights Watch said in a new report.

"The government still allows the Burmese army to kill and drive people out of their villages with complete impunity," Human Rights Watch Asia director Brad Adams said in a statement, using the military-ruled country's former name.

Three Israelis and 12 Kenyans were killed after two suicide bombers broke through barriers outside the Paradise Hotel with a four-wheel drive vehicle packed full of explosives on Nov. 28, 2002.

At almost the same time, a missile was fired but missed an Israeli airliner leaving the airport in the nearby Kenyan resort town of Mombasa.

racy, it needs also to focus on the Burmese army's brutal displacement of the Karen and other ethnic minorities."

The human rights group interviewed 46 ethnic Karen for their 70-page report. The 46 Karen together said they were displaced more than 1,000 times in their lives, five of them more than 100 times each.

"Serious economic motivations" were behind forced displacement, Adams told a press conference Thursday.

"In many parts of eastern Burma which are resource-rich, it's very clear that there is no military objective in targeting civilians and targeting villagers, but there is an economic objective," he said.

Policymakers assume the best practice for refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) is to let them return home, while international standards say the choice about returning should be up to the individual involved, Adams said.