

Arm us with drones, please

Pakistan tells USA

AP, Washington

Pakistan's Foreign Minister has said that his country has asked the United States to provide unmanned aircraft that would allow Pakistan to strike extremists hiding in rugged terrain along the Afghan border.

Shah Mahmood Qureshi said in an interview with Associated Press reporters and editors that Pakistan, and not the United States, should control the missile strikes that have killed high-level extremists but also civilians.

He is also defending, in meetings with top Obama administration officials, his government's decision to offer a peace deal to militants, and is trying to reassure Americans worried about the release from house arrest of Abdul Qadeer Khan, a scientist whose smuggling operation shipped nuclear technology to North Korea and Iran.

The US missile strikes are one of the most sensitive issues in US-Pakistan ties, and Qureshi said they are making it harder for his government to persuade infuriated Pakistanis along the frontier to support the fight against militants.

"We feel that if the technology is transferred to Pakistan, Pakistan will be in a better position to determine how to use the technology and, without alienating people, achieve the objective," he said on Wednesday.

"Pakistan is a willing partner with the US in this fight," he said. "Let us exercise that judgment."

The United States relies on nuclear-armed Pakistan to fight resurgent extremists operating along the Afghan-Pakistan border, and is eager to strengthen a Washington-backed government facing high inflation, a sinking currency, widespread poverty and a violent insurgency by Islamic militants.

But the United States has continued to fire missiles into Pakistan from drones believed launched from neighbouring Afghanistan.

Qureshi said the matter of Pakistan getting drones was raised Tuesday in a meeting with President Barack Obama's national security adviser, retired Gen. James Jones. He would not provide specific details, "we are talking at this stage," he said.

White House spokesman Robert Gibbs would not comment on Qureshi's comments Wednesday.

Qureshi also described the Obama White House as more "willing to listen" to Pakistan and "more understanding" than the Bush administration.

The Bush administration initially was a strong supporter of the current Pakistani government's predecessor, former President Pervez Musharraf, calling the former general "indispensable."

The Bush government, Qureshi said, "had a point of view, and it was like the approach was, 'This is it, take it or leave it.'"

Qureshi and Pakistan's army chief are in Washington to participate, along with Afghan Foreign Minister Dadfar Ranganen Spanta, in the Obama administration's efforts to draw up a new strategy for Pakistan and Afghanistan. Qureshi and Spanta were scheduled to have dinner Wednesday with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton. Qureshi has also met with Democratic Sen. John Kerry, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations

Committee.

Qureshi described his message to US officials as follows: "Do not doubt our commitment; this government has demonstrated its political will but make us more effective, and, if you want to see better performance, then enhance our capacity."

Pakistan, he said, needs more helicopters and night-vision technology to better fight militants.

Pentagon spokesman Geoff Morrell said the US review of Pakistan and Afghanistan "won't just be window dressing; take a look at our plan and sign off on it when it's already virtually completed."

"We are all collectively in this, and we need as much advice and buy-in as possible for this to be a success," Morrell told reporters.

Qureshi said he wanted Americans to know that Pakistan's nuclear assets are "safe and secure" and that, "as far as Pakistan is concerned, Dr AQ Khan is history. His network has been broken."

He said Pakistan would not allow US officials access to Khan, but said that Khan poses no danger as a nuclear proliferator and will not be allowed to travel abroad.

He also addressed criticism by the West of Pakistan's efforts to strike a peace deal with militants in the Swat valley. On Tuesday, militants in Swat announced an indefinite ceasefire in support of the initiative, which allows for the imposition of a version of Islamic law there.

Qureshi said the issue has been "gravely misunderstood" and that he has explained to concerned US officials that militants must lay down their weapons before any agreement is signed. "There is no question of surrender; there is no question of capitulation."

EU awaits data before move on G'tanamo

AFP, Brussels

The European Union expressed reservations yesterday about hosting Guantanamo inmates until the United States addresses EU security concerns, with no decision on accepting them likely for months.

A high-level EU delegation will travel to Washington on March 16-17 to find out exactly how US authorities decided that around 60 of the more than 240 prisoners could be released and why they cannot be hosted by the United States.

"Our objective when going to the US is not negotiations, but an exchange of information and receiving more information," said Czech Interior Minister Ivan Langer, whose country holds the EU's rotating presidency.

"Only after we have enough information, that we will circulate to member states, only then can a decision be taken," he said, after hosting talks between his EU counterparts in Brussels.

The EU's anti-terror tsar Gilles de Kerchove said that the whole process "could take three or four months, at least I would say."

EU nations have welcomed President Barack Obama's decision to close the detention centre at the US naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, and are keen to help Washington do so.

City in panic

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kilometres of the BDR headquarters saw people running for safety with children in their laps and luggage on back. A number of lucky people found rickshaws, some escaped in motorbikes and almost all had to walk.

"We are running for a safe place," said Momtaz Bewa, resident of BCS staff quarters in Nilkhet, with her three-month-old baby in her lap.

She said the evacuation announcement came around 3:30pm and more than half of about 100 families left the quarters by 5:30pm.

Several thousands employees, workers and shop owners of Nilkhet, New Market and Elephant Road left for their homes outside Dhaka. Garment workers were also seen running for shelters in groups on foot.

"My employer has given us three to four days leave and I am going to my home in Bhola," said Palash, resident of Babupara in Nilkhet, who had to loan Tk 300 for ticket.

"I am heading for char (Kamrangirchar) where my uncles live," said Nurunnahar, a garment worker.

Earlier, the day started with a completely different and unusual mood, especially around the crisis point. Vehicles mostly stayed off the roads, buzzing shopping centres remained shut down and people stayed indoors with their eyes glued to TV.

"I had two meetings at noon and in the afternoon, but I cancelled those and stayed home instead," said Shakil Reza, an executive officer at a buying house in Banani.

Private firms and service providing agencies carried out their usual everyday activities though many employees reportedly left before closing hours.

Other service providing agencies like hotels and banks reportedly carried out their usual activities excluding employees residing in Dhanmondi.

"Hotel activities were not really hampered as one would expect. Some bookings were cancelled but new guests were checking in. Almost all the staffs are present but we have excused those who live in Dhanmondi," said Razin Abbi-Mustafiz, public relations, marketing & communications officer, Hotel Sonargaron.

"We are not that worried because of the location of our hotel. But we are worried like any other citizens of the country. We are watching TV and reading news online," said Sabrina Rahman, senior public relations executive, Radisson Hotel.

Bank transactions remained as usual though many bank employees reportedly left for home right after 3:00pm when the transaction hours end.

Most educational institutions cancelled their classes. Schools and colleges were abuzz with phone calls with queries whether classes would be on.

University students mostly stayed home. Dhaka University campus was almost deserted and all the exams have been postponed until tomorrow.

Miladunnabi

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Joint Secretary of the ministry Kamal Uddin Ahmed and Islamic Foundation Secretary Hasan Jahangir Alam.

Prophet Mohammad was born on this day, the 12th of Rabiul Awal of the Arabic calendar, in 570 AD with divine blessings and messages of peace for the mankind. He also passed away on the same day in 632 A.D.

29 officials

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not started searches for bodies and the missing persons.

The officers who were rescued alive are Col Sayeed, Col Rouf, Lt Col Shams, Maj Akram, Lt Col Mukim, Lt Col Syed Kamruzzaman, Lt Col Salam, Maj Mahub, Maj Manir, Lt Col Tasmim, Maj Iqbal, Maj Zaman, Maj Yiahia, Maj Ali Ashraf, Maj Zahid, Maj Shah Alam, Maj Alamgir, Maj Masud, Maj Mokarram, Maj Istiaq, Maj Jahid, Maj Mahfuz, Maj Mokles, Maj Reaz, Maj Zaman, Maj Almas, Maj Munir, Maj Reza and Capt Kamrul.

The rescued families of the officers identified include Maj Mostafiz, Maj Maksudum Hakim, Col Shamim, Maj Mostak, Col Moshirur Rahman Col Aftab, Maj Khalid, Maj Majbarul Haider, Col Moshirur, Col Aftab, Maj Khalid, Col Zakir, Maj Rafiqul, Col Asif, Maj Mokbul, Maj Mokedled, Col Razzak, Maj Khaled Hossain, Col Salam, Col Mujib, Capt Emdad, Dr Nurunnahar, Maj Zahid, Lt Col Sayeed, Maj Mamun, Maj Humayun and Maj Sharif.

Two confined Chinese nationals, Tang Yungpeng, 30, and Xang Zhaoua, 28, were also rescued at about 5:00pm yesterday. But the reason behind their stay in the BDR Headquarters could not be known. They also did not make any comment on the condition during held hostage.

Nothing justifies

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While such media coverage seemingly drew some public sympathies, all felt that none of these allegations could justify what the mutineers have done.

The bodies recovered from sewage system bore marks of utter brutality. The bodies were mutilated by gunshots and bayonet charges and ruthlessly dumped in the sewage system. Such atrocity surprised the people as they cannot comprehend how anyone can be so hateful over an issue like low pay or being deprived of the opportunity to go to UN peace missions.

"It's globally common ethics not to support any mutiny or terrorist acts," says a defence official asking not to be named. "If there are grievances, there are many other civilised ways to express that. If mutiny is justified, it would then simply welcome terrorism."

"While amnesty may be acceptable for the general mutineers considering that there could be more bloodshed otherwise, those who committed the murders should be tried under the laws of the land. They cannot be pardoned," adds another official.

Former adviser to the caretaker government and businessman Syed Manjur-e-Elahi said in no means the havoc they [mutineers] had created could be pardoned.

"They might have some demands and could go to the home ministry with those. But instead they killed so many people; killing cannot be justified by anything," he observed.

He added, "They could have laid their arms down for their demands. Instead they took up arms and killed their officers. It cannot be supported."

"And the panic that the people of the country, especially the residents of Dhanmondi, experienced cannot be forgiven," Syed Manjur said.

Termining the killings and brutality unacceptable, Col (ret) Zakir said there may a few bad people in an organisation, but it was not wise to pin the blame on the entire force.

"BDR is a very efficient force and the army officers played important contributions to its

development. But the behaviour of the BDR personnel has crossed the atrocities of a war," said Zakir, also an executive member of Rawa Club.

Former adviser to the caretaker government Sultana Kamal told The Daily Star the ultimate loss of the mutiny was suffered by the country and the nation. "We've lost our officers, soldiers and people in the process."

She said it is a national crisis now. "One might have raised their demands there, but there should be a limit or a border in expressing grievances."

The rights activist urged everybody to be aware that such incidents could not occur again. Speaking about the mutiny, Prof Imtiaj Ahmed of Dhaka University told The Daily Star there might be a hardcore group among the BDR personnel who shaped the mutiny in a brutal way. This group should be identified, he added.

"The way the killings took place surely indicates that there was a hardcore element, which wanted to give the mutiny a worse shape," he observed.

"The group, their relationship and linkage should be brought into light through proper and professional non-partisan investigations. The government should look into the fact seriously."

Former inspector general of police Nurul Huda said such mutiny in a disciplined organisation like BDR is not expected. "By no means such killings could be justified," he said.

"They have committed a big offence and for that they should be tried according to the rules and regulations. And it is up to the government."

Meanwhile, Retired Armed Forces Officers' Welfare Association (Raowa) held an emergency meeting last night and strongly condemned the killing of officers.

In a press release, the association leaders said the mutiny was aimed at creating leadership vacuum in the well-organised force.

"We also condemn those who on television talk shows termed it an 'accumulated anger'," added the statement.

BSF shuts

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Our New Delhi correspondent reported that the BSF claimed it was unable to contact BDR personnel who left their stations keeping the gates locked.

A large number of goods-laden trucks were stranded along the border and Kolkata-Dhaka bus service was affected, said IG (BSF-South Bengal Frontier) CV Muralidhar.

BSF sources said the Indian border guards intensified patrols at important points at Hilli and Petrapole. They have been ordered to fire on sight at anyone trying to infiltrate into Indian territory after dark.

India deployed Black Cat commandos and additional forces in Petrapole border areas, the Indian side of Benapole, with heavy arms.

Additional BSF forces were being transported to Petrapole BSF Company headquarters till filing of this report yesterday afternoon.

Our Benapole correspondent adds that the BSF is patrolling the border at night with searchlights apparently to follow the movements of BDR.

Panicked drivers of goods-laden trucks moved hundreds of their vehicles to safer places from Benapole and Petrapole borders.

However, BDR jawans were seen doing their usual patrolling at a number of border posts.

Government high-ups were communicating with BDR forces patrolling the border areas so that the incident at BDR headquarters does not affect the border.

Other forces

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deprived soldiers.

He was speaking at the inaugural ceremony of the three-day 18th US Trade Show 2009 organised jointly by the American Chamber of Commerce in Bangladesh and the US Embassy at the Dhaka Sheraton Hotel.

Khan urged the BDR jawans to calm down and assured them of meeting their demands in phases.

"We have to solve problems and demands of BDR jawans through dialogue. Armed mutiny would not bring solution to any problem," he said.

Speaker rejects

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on the rebellion, only to be stopped by the speaker.

Referring to Wednesday's unscheduled discussion on the matter, Hamid said, "Please listen to me. Two of your leaders talked on the issue Wednesday, and deputy leader of parliament informed the House that the home minister would make a statement tonight."

As Anne tried to go on, the speaker said, "I won't allow speaking on the issue. I hope the home minister will come and make a statement in the House."

The BNP lawmaker sat down after that.

Earlier on Wednesday, the opposition lawmakers submitted adjournment motions for discussing the border guards' mutiny against their commanding officers.

ISSESSION EXTENDED
The current session of parliament will continue till March 12.

The Business Advisory Committee (BAC) took the decision at a meeting with Speaker Hamid in the chair yesterday.

As per the previous schedule, February 26 was supposed to be the last workday of this session.

According to the latest decision, the House will sit at 3:00pm every day except weekend and public holidays.

Deputy Leader of Parliament Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, Deputy Speaker Shawkat Ali, Chief Whip of the treasury bench Abdus Shahid, senior lawmakers Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta, Rahmat Ali, Abdul Matin Khasru and Fazle Rabbi Mia attended the meeting.

BNP lawmaker Salauddin Quader Chowdhury represented Leader of the Opposition in Parliament Khaleda Zia.

Stray bullet hits

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the SC halted their judicial functions, sources said.

Most of the lawyers, litigants and staff of the court and its bar association also left the court area after 2:00pm. They were under the impression the bullet was fired from the BDR headquarters in Pilkhana.

The court premises became almost deserted before office hours had ended. Witnesses said around 1:15pm the bullet hit the parked car of lawyer JN Deb in the Supreme Court Bar Association (SCBA) office compound. The bullet shattered the rear windshield but no one was hurt.

A number of lawyers informed a few judges of the matter while their courts were in session. The judges left their courts.

On information, an assistant sub-inspector (ASI) of Shahbagh Police Station went to the spot and recovered the bullet.

Calm across country

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Satkania in Chittagong, Lance Nayek Abdus Shahid of Rangpur BDR HQ and sepoy Najrul Islam of 39 Rifles Battalion in Chapainawabganj.

Two army officials were taken hostages by BDR men at around 11:00am from a village in Satkania. They had been holed up there after fleeing Baitul Uzzat BDR Training Centre in Chittagong. What happened to them could not be known as of 8:00pm.

Export and import at Sonamasjid in Chapainawabganj, Bhomra in Sakhira and Benapole in Jessore remained suspended as border guards barricaded the highways leading to the land ports.

In some places, jawans asked locals to move far off to safety.

Many army officials in the paramilitary force on deputation have fled battalion headquarters, fearing a fate like their peers in Dhaka.

A wave of fear spread through people in Chapainawabganj, Rajshahi, Thakurgaon, Rangpur, Sakhira, Jessore, Kushtia, Meherpur, Chuadanga, Brahmanbaria and Panchagarh districts as they saw a heavy built-up of BDR troops on roads.

To add to public worries, mobile phone network in Jessore, Kushtia, Meherpur, Chuadanga and Sakhira was suspended from noon to 6:00pm.

Our Rangpur correspondent reports: Members of 34 battalion of Rangpur BDR left the headquarters and massed on

Dhaka-Rangpur-Dinajpur highway amid rumours that army men were launching an offensive against them.

They kept the highway barricaded till 2:30pm. Army officers left the headquarters for safe shelters in the early hours yesterday.

Our Chapainawabganj correspondent reports: BDR jawan Nazrul Islam was bullet-hit while loading his rifle.

Preparing for an army assault, they barricaded Chapainawabganj-Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj-Sonamasjid highways with huge trunks of trees.

To avoid bloodletting, the local administration took BDR officials to safety, said sources.

Our correspondent in Rajshahi says: Rebel jawans took control of BDR compound by the Airport Road at Shalagan yesterday morning.

They fired blank shots and brandished mortars, shotguns, and grenades.

The road emptied as gunshots rang out in the area. Our Kushtia Correspondent reports: BDR men left a 215-km stretch of border unattended in Meherpur, Kushtia and Chuadanga at around 11:00am and gathered at the barracks.

3 of a family killed

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in their second-storey flat around 6:00pm.

She said she and Sayema's husband were not at home. When she returned, she saw seven to eight people leave the building.

US sees

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women, saying that few men were punished for crimes from severe domestic violence to gang rape to so-called 'honour killings' of family members.

The State Department said that the rights situation remained weak in Afghanistan, despite improvements since the 2001 invasion that toppled the Taliban regime.

It acknowledged that President Hamid Karzai's government lacked control over much of Afghanistan. Citing rights groups, the report said 'local law-enforcement tortured detainees, including by pulling out their nails, burning them with oil and sodomy.'

The State Department said that India -- the region's largest country and the world's biggest democracy -- generally respected human rights.

But the report said that most extrajudicial killings and other abuse cases went unpunished and it voiced concern about 'increasing attacks' against religious minorities in the secular but Hindu-majority nation.

The report also noted 'serious problems' in India in treatment of women, including killings related to dowry payments and infanticide of baby girls.

One of the bleakest points in the region was Sri Lanka, where the State Department said both the government and Tamil Tiger rebels committed a growing number of abuses as the three-decade war climaxed.

It said that young Tamil men made up the 'overwhelming majority' of victims of human rights violations, even though Tamils make up only 16 percent of the population in the Sinhalese-majority nation.

They line up

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secretary general of Help Bangladesh told the army.

The army tried to stop them but the group of young people continued holding up their placards scribbled with messages for peace.

"We have also come here to die as you soldiers are likely to," Moshirur Rahman Mann, a participant.

Aiming to peacefully push through whatever was to happen ahead, the group formed a human chain at around 3:00 between the BDR gate and the line of army tanks and artilleries, forming a human shield between the two groups.

As soon as they took up their positions, locals who saw them on television news reports rushed out and bravely joined the human chain.

They held hands and chanted peaceful slogans resonating the whole area with slogans of love and life.

The placards carried slogans like "Please stop the firing," "We want peace not war" and "Protect our border, maintain peace".

The people, showed that they care.

By contrast, the report found that violence "declined significantly" last year in Bangladesh, where a caretaker government overtook elections.

The State Department, however, said that human rights remained a "serious concern" in Bangladesh with authorities failing to investigate extrajudicial killings.

In Nepal, the State Department noted that elections produced the "most diverse legislature in the country's history" and peacefully dissolved the monarchy -- the goal of a 'bloody, decade-long Maoist insurrection.'

But the report said there was still an atmosphere of impunity for rights violators and that groups linked to the Maoists -- now in the government -- continued abuses in the former kingdom.

The State Department said the rights "improved considerably" in the Himalayan state of Bhutan as it transitioned from a monarchy to a democracy.

It also noted the transition in Maldives, where former political prisoner Mohamed Nasheed ousted Asia's longest serving leader Maumoon Abdul Gayoom in the archipelago's first multi-party election.

Pakistan

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perpetrators' cell phone interceptions.

It also demanded DNA samples and 'clear' photographs of the ten terrorists killed during the operation.

Meanwhile, the director of the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) will lead a team visiting Pakistan next month to help investigate the Mumbai attacks, the foreign ministry said Thursday.

New Delhi blamed the attacks, which killed 165 people last November, on the Pakistan-based militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) and the siege soured a five-year peace process between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan.

"Headed by Robert Mueller, the team will arrive in Pakistan on March 4," foreign office spokesman Abdul Basit told a press briefing in Islamabad.

Indian police have charged the man accused of being the lone surviving gunman in the Mumbai attacks with murder and "waging war against India".

The suspect, Pakistan's Mohammed Ajmal Amir Iman -- also known as Kasab -- was the only alleged member of the 10-man Islamist commando-style unit captured alive during the November 26-29 siege.

"We hope that the FBI team, which also visited India and held meetings there, will assist us by providing further intelligence information," Basit told reporters.

Both LeT and Pakistan have denied any involvement in the attacks but the government in Islamabad admitted this month for the first time that the strikes were partly planned on its soil.

Islamabad said it had filed a case against eight people suspected of a role in the attacks, and that six of them were in custody.

BDR chief killed

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"As the DG climbed down the stairs of darbar hall, one jawan sprayed him with bullets. Soon the other jawans there started firing on us," said Kamruzzaman.

"I dived on the ground after a bullet hit me in the stomach. Somehow I managed to crawl myself inside a washroom. A few minutes later, some jawans found that I was hiding in a toilet. They fired a volley of shots at me, but miraculously none hit me," he went on.

"As one jawan pointed his gun at my chest, in desperation I hugged him tightly and asked, 'Why will you kill me? What harm did I do to you?'