

Drone attack inside Pakistan to continue, says US

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, ANI, Washington/Lahore

CIA Director Leon Panetta has said that the US aerial attacks against al-Qaeda and other extremist strongholds inside Pakistan have been successful and would continue despite concerns about a popular Pakistani backlash.

He said the drone strikes have so far turned successful in accomplishing goals. "Nothing has changed our efforts to go after terrorists, and nothing will change those efforts," Panetta said in response to questions about CIA missile attacks launched from unmanned Predator aircraft.

Although he refused to discuss details of the attacks, Panetta said the efforts begun under former president George W. Bush to destabilise al-Qaeda and destroy its leadership, which "have been successful".

"I don't think we can stop just at the effort to try to disrupt them. I think it has to be a continuing effort, because they aren't going to stop," Panetta said in his first news briefing since taking the job.

The CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) has launched about three-dozen drone (pilotless aircraft) attacks in Pakistan, and two of them during President Barack Obama's administration, Geo TV reported Thursday.

Meanwhile, a day after Pakistan Foreign Minister

Shah Mehmood claimed that he had asked Washington to let Islamabad handle the drone attacks on militant hideouts inside its territory, the United States has said that the issue of drone attacks was not discussed with Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff General Ashfaq Kayani.

Talking to mediapersons after holding talks with General Kayani, US Defence Secretary Robert Gates said: "The issue of drone attacks inside Pakistan did not come under discussion during the meeting."

General Kayani also met the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman, Mike Mullen.

Mullen said that the talks helped US to understand the intricacies of the Swat peace deal.

Referring to the US training programme being carried out in Pakistan to train security forces against militants, Mullen said that there was nothing 'secret' in it as the 'Train the Trainers' programme was launched six months ago.

"The training of the Frontier Corps (FC) personnel by the US officials will improve the FC's capability to fight terrorism in the region," Mullen said.

General Kayani was also honored by the US Army Command and General Staff College, The Daily Times reports.

List of the dead

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19. Maj Rabi
20. Lt Col Badrul
21. Maj Mosharrar
22. Col Abu Musa Ayub Kaiser,
23. Col Mujibul Huq
24. Lt Col Enayetur Haq
25. Subedar Abul Kashem Majumder
26. Amjad Ali, 50, retired daily worker
27. Tarek Aziz, 23, a BBA student of People's University
28. Captain Majharul Haider Rubel,
29. Hridoy Mia, 14, a vegetable vendor
30. Col Anisuzzaman
31. Col Zahid,
32. Col Aftabul Islam,
33. Brig Gen MA Bari, additional director general (ADG), BDR

The rest of the bodies were not identified

BDR installations

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head DAD Nurul Islam Fakir. In Kurigram, BDR jawans of 27 Rifles Battalion released Maj Kamal, Maj Altaf and Commanding Officer Suman Kumar Barua and surrendered their arms to Kurigram DC Asaduzzaman. The police took control of the battalion headquarters.

Our Chittagong correspondent reports: BDR jawans as well as departmental officers of BDR Chittagong Sector Headquarters began surrendering weapons and ammunition, said Chittagong Deputy Commissioner Ashraf Shamim in a evening.

Our correspondent in Dinajpur adds: the police took control of the BDR sector headquarters at Kuthibari in the afternoon.

Our Rajshahi correspondent reports: The bordering areas remained vulnerable as distraught BDR members were reluctant to return to duty amid confusion.

A BOP commander told The Daily Star, "The smugglers will not be able to cash in on the prevailing situation as the Indian Border Security Force remains on red alert on the other side of the border."

Our correspondent from Benapole adds: Although BDR jawans patrolled the border with India at Benapole, the situation remained tense.

The jawans were without a commanding officer as no army officer deputed to BDR went to the Benapole border camps or barracks.

Hundreds of passengers and goods-laden trucks remained stranded on the Benapole-Petrapole border after Indian Border Security Force (BSF) closed their side of the border.

Khaleda

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their family members. "Time was wasted in the name of negotiations and junior level representatives were assigned," she said.

She made the comments at a media briefing last night in her Gulshan office, but she did not take any question from reporters.

Earlier in the day, she visited the Combined Military Hospital in Dhaka to see first hand the casualties, and later met the bereaved families of slain army officers. She also stood in silence before the coffins of the slain officers.

"It is clear that the incident was instigated by some anti-state forces, I am demanding that the conspiracy is unearthed," Khaleda said, adding that the Pilkhana tragedy has given rise to resentments and mistrust, which must be resolved soon.

She said, "The nation wants to know how the killers fled after surrendering arms following the announcement of the general amnesty. The government should disclose specific information on the matters for the sake of national interest."

Urging all to maintain the highest level of vigilance while staying united, she said, "It's not a time for revenge. We are facing a great danger as a nation."

Khaleda said, "I've seen the dead bodies in CMH and talked to the family members of slain officers. They said the dead bodies had been mutilated with bayonets. Even women and children were tortured and killed."

The sullying of the glorious reputation and legacy of the force has been an irreparable loss, she said.

National mourning was declared, "although after a delay", she said, urging her party members to join in the mourning.

Khaleda said BDR played a heroic role in protecting the country's border, and to protect that legacy, it is now imperative to reorganise the force and restore its chain of command.

BNP Secretary General Khandaker Delwar Hossain, and senior leaders Saifur Rahman, Khandaker Mosharrar Hossain, Jamiruddin Sircar, Altaf Hossain Chowdhury, and Rizvi Ahmed were present among others.

BNP POSTPONED PROGRAMMES

BNP yesterday said all its programmes will remain postponed during the three-day national mourning declared by the government.

A programme of today marking the founding anniversary of Jatiyatabadi Matsajibi Dal was also postponed, said a party news release signed by its Office Secretary Rizvi Ahmed.

Mass grave horror

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trucks," added Major Momtaj. A group of heavily armed border troops led the acts of mindless violence.

They said they were only protesting discriminations. But now as the extent of brutalities emerges, rescuers say, it seems the bloodbath might have been instigated by "some unseen quarters with an ill motive".

They added that the atrocities reminded them of the torture and genocide carried out by the Pakistan occupation army in 1971.

"Officers' houses were looted and their cars set on fire. The two-storey residence of the DG was left in ruins. The staircase there was stained with blood," said a rescuer who would not speak on record.

The mutineers ransacked and burned the house of slain Colonel Mujibul Haq.

"We suspect some of those missing were killed and reduced to ashes," he said citing information gleaned from some BDR jawans who opted to stay put after the revolt ended Thursday evening.

Around 300 jawans are now inside the headquarters. They claim they did not participate in the mutiny or any brutalities. "But they were forced to cooperate with the culprits," said the rescuer.

"They did not try to escape as they felt the army won't do them any harm once things calm down," he added.

Another rescuer who had talked to one such "involuntary mutineer", told The Daily Star, "It seems there was a plan chalked out long ago. Those who committed the atrocities were young soldiers recruited in the last few years. They received huge sums from somewhere, and did not care much about their career."

The police took control of the BDR headquarters Thursday. The army and Rab entered the compound with armoured personnel carriers at 10:00am yesterday.

At around 12:30pm, army rescue squads recovered huge Arges grenades, machine guns and ammunition and a mortar from atop the arch at the main entrance.

Some rescuers said they found arms and ammunition

Families wait

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and Mitford hospital and returned disappointed.

MA Hasan Babul, brother-in-law of BDR Director General (DG) Shakil Ahmed, was also found in front of the BDR Gate-4 with the deceased DG's mother and three sisters.

They were all waiting to receive the DG and his wife's body till filing of the report at 4:00pm.

-- Edited by George D'Costa

20-25 soldiers

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Some went to the arms depot and broke open its doors. Then they forced other soldiers present in Pilkhana to take up arms as well, many of whom were there that day from battalions outside Dhaka, on the occasion of the BDRWeek.

"If you don't take up arms and join us, you will be shot," a leader of the mutiny was quoted by a soldier, who like many others fled the headquarters on Thursday.

He said the majority of the soldiers were against the killing of so many officers.

"There were arguments between the mutiny leaders and other soldiers about the killings. Many tried to convince the leaders that all officers are not bad. But the leaders were furious," he said.

Another soldier said many of the soldiers felt deprived and were angry about the role of some top officers, whom they branded as corrupt.

"There was no argument about the fate of the corrupt persons," he said adding some soldiers were also killed as they tried to stop the killings.

The soldiers said most of them broke down in tears seeing so many dead bodies of officers, scattered at different places in the compound. Initially many bodies were dumped in sewers.

The wholesale killing prompted them to flee the headquarters, the soldiers added.

They also said there was no specific leader of the mutiny. All soldiers of the small leading group seemed to be the leaders in the brutality.

They said a few officers were able to come out alive from Pilkhana, because many of the soldiers protested when

scattered all over Pilkhana. They recovered arms even from ponds inside.

Arms were found just outside the headquarters as well. "We believe some mutineers have fled with small arms," said a rescuer.

All the arms recovered have been taken to the armoury.

Since early morning yesterday, people crowded the BDR gates and sites of rescue operation beyond the compound.

At the Jhigatala entrance, anxious relatives of the army personnel missing waited for hours with eyes brimming with tears. They kept enquiring if there was any news of their dear ones. Some of them resented the failure to save the family members.

Lt Col Sajjad's wife was seen lying nearly unconscious on the pavement in front of the main gate at around 12:30pm. She kept mumbling. "They [authorities] must let me know if he is dead or alive."

Sajjad's body was among those recovered from the mass grave at around 5:00pm.

Meanwhile, the unrest at BDR outposts in different districts quietened down yesterday. At Kurigram outpost, the jawans released three officers taken hostage Thursday and sent them to Rangpur Cantonment.

Pay no heed

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how to resolve this problem," he said.

He said it's a big crisis which is not only for the armed forces but for the country as well. "It's not only the responsibility of the armed forces but also for the country to resolve it."

General Moeen said he has got different suggestions from different points of the country and the Prime Minister responded positively to all those points.

"The armed forces are subservient to the government. But there are many rumours," he said, requesting the media to help so that the country moves in a right direction.

Before broadcasting any information, media should crosscheck it. "We're not counterpart of anyone. By spreading rumour whom we're damaging," he said, adding that "during the war of liberation, we came out at the call and we liberated the country."

"This army is yours," General Moeen said urging the media to broadcast the information after crosschecking instead of lending ear to rumours.

The general said, "If you give wrong information, members of the army misinterpret it. If necessary, ring us. Please project the fact—that's our expectation."

Chavez blasts US criticism on human rights

AFP, Caracas

President Hugo Chavez yesterday blasted US criticism of his government for alleged human rights abuses, and said there was no reason for much hope from the Barack Obama administration.

"Well we can't hold out much hope with this new US government, which will continue to be an empire; and the empire tramples on people, now irresponsibly accusing us of violating human rights," Chavez said in an interview on state television.

In a report released Thursday in Washington, the State Department said non-governmental organizations in Venezuela "noted an erosion of both democratic and human rights, with potentially severe consequences."

Chavez demanded the United States extradite Cuban-born Venezuelan Luis Posada Carriles, whom Chavez charged was "protected" in the United States after the "crimes he committed."

Posada Carriles was arrested in 2005 on US immigration charges, but was released in May 2007 after a federal judge in Texas dropped the indictment, saying the government tricked the ex-CIA contractor by using a citizenship interview to obtain evidence against him.

In an appeal of the decision, the US government insisted that "the record shows no deceit or trickery, nor outrageous conduct that justifies the extreme sanction of dismissal."

His great

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"As blood gushing out of Maksud sir's body flooded the floor, I took it in my hands, stained my face with it and pretended dead," Monir told The Daily Star late Thursday night.

He said he had cut his forehead with a piece of shattered glass in his desperate attempt to make them believe that he was dead. As the blood coming out of his forehead was not enough, he took the blood of Major Maksud.

The men came in later and then left seeing the blood-spattered bodies and believing Monir and Maksud were dead.

He said, "Realising that the place was not safe, I then hid myself in a drain and covered myself with a floor mat. To do this, I had to break the windowpane of the washroom to escape."

"I watched helplessly as jawans killed officers around me... one of the officers being shot fell on me when I was in the drain," he said.

"Realising that this place was not safe as well, I went inside the Darbar Hall again and hid inside the false ceiling for almost two days. I texted my wife several times from there but kept my phone off."

"I heard a jawan boasting before another jawan that he had killed 15 officers," he said.

Major Monir is one of the few lucky officers who made it back to their families. Major Firoz was also one of the lucky few. He, his pregnant wife and his two-year-old son survived the two-day ordeal.

When BDR jawans started shooting, Firoz crawled out of Darbar Hall in Pilkhana. "I managed to take shelter next to a wall of a school inside the BDR headquarters. I found Major Towfiq there. We managed to dodge death hiding inside the room of a flat there," he said.

"The BDR jawans let my eight-month pregnant wife go as she was experiencing pain," he said.

She started walking with her son, who was traumatised by the deafening sounds of gunshots, grenades and choppers flying overhead, towards Kamrangirchar but she fell unconscious on the way, said Firoz breaking down in tears.

Locals rescued her Thursday and informed Firoz's elder brother.

The son has become speechless.

Hasan Mahmud Rupom, brother of missing Major Mostaq Mahmud, said,

"I heard that bodies of some officers were retrieved in the afternoon at the BDR headquarters but I am not sure whether my brother is among them."

He described the ordeal of Major Mustaq's triplets, aged around 10, and the son of a relative, of about the same age, who were inside Mustaq's quarters when the mutiny broke out.

"My brother went to Darbar Hall in the morning while his wife, a doctor, went out before the mutiny began," Rupom said.

He said they finally found the traumatised children inside the quarters Thursday afternoon.

US, Afghans, Pakistan see 'common terror threat'

AFP, Washington

Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States vowed Thursday to fight a common threat of terrorism, pledging to chart out a new strategy despite sharp differences simmering below the surface.

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said the three countries would hold a regular dialogue after she met in Washington with the South Asian neighbours' foreign ministers for talks she called "valuable and unprecedented."

"Our three nations have a common goal, a common threat and a common task. And my government commits itself to our friends and to the success of this common endeavour," Clinton told reporters.

She said the next trilateral talks were set tentatively for late April or early May.

President Barack Obama has vowed a new focus on fighting a resurgent Taliban and al-Qaeda in the region and is sending 17,000 more troops to Afghanistan as his administration winds down the US involvement in Iraq.

Afghan Defence Minister Mohammad Rahim Wardak, who came to Washington for the talks, welcomed the fresh deployments and hoped they would help rid the country of remnants of the Taliban regime, which was ousted in the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001.

"We can expect 2009 to be a critical year and we should be prepared for the challenges and yet we are optimistic to turn the tide in our favour," Wardak told a Washington think tank.

"We still lack sufficient forces and equipment to hold our gains and to facilitate good governance and development."

"The requirements of our national security forces are urgent and undeniable," he added.

The three-way meeting comes as relations sharply improve between Kabul and Islamabad after civilian Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari took over last year from former army chief Pervez Musharraf.

But Zardari's government has remained under pressure from both Kabul and Washington, which are concerned that insurgents fleeing Afghanistan enjoy a virtual safe haven in Pakistan's lawless border areas.

Richard Holbrooke, the US envoy to the region, has voiced dismay after Pakistan agreed to a ceasefire with pro-Taliban militants in Pakistan's Swat Valley in a deal that includes the imposition of Islamic

Brutally killed

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A witness to the operation said the undressed bodies were dumped first inside the hole as these bodies were found at bottom of the hole while the uniformed bodies were found above.

Some rescuers suspected that the killers undressed many of the officials during dumping. At one stage, they dumped the bodies in uniform as they buried the bodies in a hurry.

Commander SMAK Azad, director legal and media wing of Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) who was present during the recovery operation, told The Daily Star, "It is difficult to identify the bodies, as the bodies were decomposed after burial."

He said one of the officials sent him a message while he was trapped in a room.

Witnesses said 16 bodies were found undressed while others in BDR uniform among the recovered bodies. It was difficult to identify the bodies of uniformed BDR men, as there were no badges on the uniform.

Sources said some officials removed their badges from the uniform to save themselves during the attack.

Many officers took shelter inside manholes and drains but they could not save themselves.

Mutineers flee

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Most of the escapees put off their uniforms inside the boundary wall and the others outside it, said Jahangir, another local.

Some people of the area later threw inside the wall the uniforms found outside it to avert possible trouble.

"About 1,000 people crossed the boundary wall at five points near BDR Gate-2 at Azimpur," said a local resident seeking not to be named.

Two rifles were found in a drain just inside the wall near Gate-2 at 3:00 pm yesterday, one source said.

Sharia law.

Holbrooke took part in the three-way talks along with General David Petraeus, who commands US forces in the Middle East and Central Asia.

Holbrooke worried the Swat Valley deal amounts to a surrender after a bloody two-year campaign by militants who have attacked girls' schools and entertainment in the onetime ski resort.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi defended the deal, saying it neutralized the threat of extremists by meeting local concerns.

His Afghan counterpart, Ranganee Dadfar Spanta, said that while he strongly supported the new Zardari government, nuclear-armed Pakistan remained a top worry for Afghanistan as it fights militants.

"My thesis is that the main threat centre for instability in the world is not Iraq, it is not Afghanistan, it is much more Pakistan," Spanta said.

"If Pakistan becomes a failed state, it is a serious threat for you, for us and for the entire region."

But Pakistan has concerns of its own that it wants addressed.

Qureshi said Pakistan wanted the United States to consider ending US drone attacks inside the country that have killed militants but also civilians, inflaming local opinion.

He said after the talks that he felt optimistic about dealing with the Obama, whose predecessor George W. Bush was closely allied with military ruler Musharraf.

"We get the sense from this administration that they are really willing to listen to us," Qureshi said.

Special court

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Gen Mubin said the incidents of Wednesday and Thursday have broken the BDR chain of command and rendered the force as well as the country very vulnerable.

"It is a must to restore the chain in the interests of national security. The government has already appointed Brig Gen Moinul director general of BDR, and under his leadership the command structure would be rebuilt."

He said the heinous acts perpetrated by disgruntled BDR members in the last two days have obviously tarnished the country's image.

"Vested interests were out to damage the reputation of the patriotic armed forces of our beloved motherland."

Urging all members of the defence forces, especially those of the army, to play a responsible role through restraint for the sake of the nation, the PSO said the prime minister and the government are fully aware of the sentiment and reactions of the military community, and they empathise with them.

"Now we all have to work in unison to show respect to the departed souls of the officers slain in the last two days. For national security and peace, it is our moral duty to remain united at this critical juncture," he noted.

8 arms

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Rab made the recovery in a joint search.

Sources said divers of navy and fire service recovered two rifles, four SMGs, one LMG, one pistol, 18 magazines and around 7,000 rounds of bullet from several ponds.

Meanwhile, Rab members recovered a grenade, 408 rounds of bullet and two magazines of SMG from areas near Moneswar Road.

They also held Jasim Uddin and Mohammad Sumon for stealing the arms and ammunition abandoned by BDR soldiers.

BDR chief

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killers of army officers.

She said the government would also find out the patrons behind the carnage and take tough action against them.

The home minister urged all to exercise patience.

Burial today

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With the relatives of the slain officers, council of ministers, chiefs of three services, a number of political leaders, a large number of military officials and civilians attended the janaza, says a press release of Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR).

Members of the bereaved families demanded fair trial of the brutal killing.