



Pakistan situation 'very grave': Miliband

INDO-ASIAN NEWS SERVICE, London

The security situation in parts of Pakistan has worsened because of policy flip-flops, British Foreign Secretary David Miliband said Friday.

"The situation is very grave.... It's getting worse because the tempo of terrorist attacks has risen," Miliband said, putting down the worsening scenario to a combination of political uncertainty, economic decline and the mounting security challenge.

Miliband criticised Pakistani policy in the North West Frontier Province - home to al-Qaeda and other militants - suggesting a recent move to strike a peace deal with Islamic militants in parts of the NWFP revealed an inconsistency in strategy.

"The way the Pakistan authorities have pursued their counter-insurgency strat-

egy, which has essentially been to move from a series of deals three or four years ago to a very heavy handed military strategy and in some cases to flip back, has not got the right recipe for delivering a significant outcome."

"In some ways in some parts of the NWFP things have gone worse. That obviously has an impact over on the Afghan side of the border," Miliband told the BBC.

However, the British minister pointed out that the situation in NWFP, especially the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), was also the result of decades of neglect and a failure to develop an economic or political strategy.

"Female literacy rate is less than three percent - so you can sense the social disintegration - political parties are banned and the law is defined by the Frontier Crimes Regulation which was

passed by the British in 1901. So this is not a short term problem."

However, Miliband denied suggestions that the previous government headed by Pervez Musharraf had been more successful in confronting terrorists, saying: "a military rule cannot hold the line if it loses the confidence of its people and I think that is what had happened, especially in the later years of President Musharraf's rule."

"He had lost the confidence of his own people and you cannot [devise] a counter-insurgency if you do not have the confidence of the people."

Miliband said he had repeatedly urged successive Pakistan governments to strike at the Lashkar-e-Taiba, which is blamed for last year's terrorist attacks in Mumbai, by pushing state educational and welfare organisations.

Mayor killed in Pakistan bomb blast

AFP, Miranshah

The mayor of a town in remote northwest Pakistan was killed and his driver wounded Friday when a roadside bomb planted by suspected Taliban militants exploded near his car, police said.

The mayor of the town of Kaki, about 70 kilometres (45 miles) east of Miranshah, the main town in North Waziristan tribal district, was travelling in the Mundan area when the explosion took place.

"Mayor Khair Ullah died and his driver was injured after his vehicle was hit by a remote-controlled bomb," police official Saleem Khan told AFP.

Khan did not say who was believed to be behind the bombing.

Pakistani Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) Director General Tariq Khosa, (R) and Interior Secretary Syed Kamal Shah pose as Interior Minister chief Rehman Malik (L) shakes hands with Interpol secretary general Ronald Noble prior to a meeting in Islamabad yesterday. Noble is on his second visit to Islamabad since the Mumbai attacks.

PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan lacks will to tackle terrorism, says Pranab

PTI, New Delhi/ Washington

Describing the attack on Sri Lankan cricketers in Lahore as the "most disturbing" development, India today said the incident showed Pakistan's lack of will to tackle terrorism. New Delhi warned that world will not remain immune to the "flames ignited there" unless the international community ensured that Pakistan dismantled the terror infrastructure on an urgent basis.

"As this week's reprehensible attack on Lankan cricketers in Lahore shows, government's lack of will or capability in tackling this menace becomes a major hindrance in the smooth process of change," External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee said at the India Today Conclave here. He also stressed that nations that have used terror as an instrument of state policy should be left with no choice but to dismantle their infrastructure of terrorism and "actively coop-

erate" with the international community to eliminate this scourge.

Mukherjee said this threat needed the efforts of the international community at large to "ensure that it is eliminated on an urgent basis."

Meanwhile, Pakistan has been "playing game with the US" at least when it comes to the war against terrorism, cross border terrorism and Kashmir, a former top US intelligence officer has said.

US wants 'constructive' Iran at Afghan meeting

AFP, Washington

The White House said Thursday it hoped all Afghanistan's neighbours including Iran would show up to a special conference on the war-torn nation's future security this month.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced the possible high-level meeting on

Afghanistan during her current trip to Europe, and the White House then said it hoped Tehran would be "constructive" if it took part.

"Obviously Afghanistan is something that presents a great challenge, not just for our country, but for the rest of the world," White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said.

"I would expect that Iran would be invited as a neighbor and that we hope, if they decide to come, that they bring constructive solutions and ideas in working with the international community to address the challenges."

Asked whether Clinton or other US officials would meet directly with Iranian envoys to the conference, Gibbs said it was too far down the road to contemplate.

He spoke after a high-level Pakistani delegation, including army chief of staff General Ashfaq Kayani, visited Washington last week as President Barack Obama's administration reviews US strategy in Afghanistan and the region.

Morrell said Pakistani officials shared US concerns about the presence of militants on its territory, including the al-Qaeda network.

"What the (US defence) secretary heard from General Kayani is that they recognise that the militants, the terrorists in their midst are as much a threat to them as they are to us," he said.

Even as suspense continues over alliance between the Congress and the Samajwadi Party, the SP chief Mulayam Singh Yadav has said his party would not field candidates against UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi.

Mulayam, who was on a whirlwind tour of his village Saifai on Thursday, expressed hope of reaching a consensus with the Congress over seat sharing and said the party will not contest from Rae Bareli and Amethi constituencies represented by Sonia and Rahul respectively.

The SP supremo said in case the alliance fails to materialise on a few seats, the party will have a friendly fight with the Congress.

Earlier the Samajwadi Party

yesterday said it cannot give more than 17 seats to the Congress in Uttar Pradesh as part of pre-poll alliance for the Lok Sabha elections.

The Congress, on its part, has already released a list of 24 candidates for the polls.

"We had offered 17 seats to the Congress, but they don't

want anything less than 24 seats. However, we cannot give more than 17 seats," Amar Singh, general secretary of the Samajwadi Party told reporters here Friday.

Singh, however, refused to comment on whether the alliance was still on.

"I am not using harsh words that the alliance has broken. But, even if there is no alliance we will not put candidates against Congress president Sonia Gandhi and general secretary Rahul Gandhi in Rae Bareli and Amethi constituencies," Singh said.

Talks between the two parties for a pre-poll alliance have been going on for long. The Samajwadi Party, which has announced candidates for 64 of the 80 Lok Sabha constituencies in Uttar Pradesh, had offered 17 seats to the Congress.

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