

Britain never held any secret talks with Taliban: Miliband

No threat to Pak democratic set-up

ANI, Lahore/Islamabad

British Foreign Secretary David Miliband has rejected claims that he held secret talks with the Afghan Taliban leadership, saying that the United Kingdom has never negotiated with any militant group.

"(Taliban Supreme Commander) Mullah Omar is a criminal," the Daily Times quoted Miliband, as saying.

He, however, said, that Afghan officials were making efforts to engage the Taliban in a dialogue.

Replying to a question, Miliband said he had never claimed that al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden was hiding in Pakistan, "but the al-Qaeda leader was also not in Afghanistan".

He pointed out that there was a lot of difference between the Taliban and the al-Qaeda, as the Taliban had no global agenda.

"On the other hand, al-Qaeda was created in the backdrop of the Arab-Israeli war," he added.

Earlier Miliband has said that there is

no threat to the democratic set up of Pakistan, as Islamabad has the full backing of the international community in preserving the democracy.

The News quoted Miliband, as saying that a democratic set-up is the best option for Pakistan and the current government has proved this during the last two years.

Addressing the joint news conference with Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi here on Saturday, Miliband said that a democratic government would ensure that all friends would support Pakistan.

Responding to a query regarding promises the world community had made to Pakistan but nothing substantial has been done, Miliband assured that Britain would keep its promise.

"As far as fiscal cooperation is concerned, Britain has given 665 million pounds as development aid to be used over four years and we understand that Pakistan wants to build on trade not aid. We talk truthfully and turn our words into deeds," he said.

He said the main objective of his Islamabad visit was to take Pakistan into confidence about the London Conference on Afghanistan on January 28.

"Over 60 countries will participate in the London Conference on Afghanistan on January 28. Pakistan is a vital partner for the future of Afghanistan. Stability, security and prosperity in Afghanistan depends on the same values in Pakistan," he said.

The issue of denial of visas by Britain to Pakistani students was also raised during the conference.

Replying to a question that Pakistani students were being kept in the British custody without any charges being proved, Miliband said that this did not damage Britain's image.

"The important thing is that the judicial process is according to the law and not image. Legal process takes time. It is good that there are 10,000 students studying in Britain," Miliband said.



Relatives of deceased Indian student Nitin Garg hold his photograph during his cremation ceremony at Jagraon, about 40km from Ludhiana yesterday. Garg, 21, was stabbed to death by unidentified attackers in Melbourne, Australia on January 2 and the attack was the latest in a series of assaults on Indian students and others in Australia in recent months.



Indian and foreign devotees gather to catch a glimpse of Tibetan spiritual leader The Dalai Lama at the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodhgaya yesterday. Exiled Tibetan spiritual leader The Dalai Lama is spending a week in the eastern Indian city where Buddha attained enlightenment, where he will pray and deliver teachings to followers.

Delay in aid dispensation could disrupt war on terror: Zardari

ANI, Washington

Pakistan President Asif Ali Zardari has warned that delay in the dispensation of international aid could force Pakistan to cut development spending, which in turn could be a "setback for the war on terror."

"Given the severity of the internal security challenge. It is critical that the economy is provided a strong stimulus as quickly as possible," the Daily Times quoted Zardari, as saying.

In an article in the Foreign Affairs magazine, Zardari said that Pakistan is making concerted efforts to stabilise the economy and contain militancy, but world powers must step up support for the country's government.

He added that the country was paying a heavy price for sharing a border with Afghanistan.

"Up to 2.5 million internally displaced persons following operations against terrorists in northwestern areas drove the direct cost of the conflict to an estimated 45 billion dollars. We have chosen to fight terror and stand firm in this struggle alongside our allies," he said.

At the same time, Zardari underlined the implications of Pakistan's support against Soviet occupation of Afghanistan.

BSF steps up vigil to foil Kashmir infiltration

ANI, RS Pura New Delhi

The Border Security Force (BSF) has reinforced the night patrolling along the India-Pakistan border in Kashmir Valley to foil infiltration bid by terror groups.

The militants generally attempt to infiltrate into Indian side by taking advantage of the dense fog and cold wave prevailing in the region.

The BSF personnel have braved the intense weather conditions to patrol from the Octroi post in Suchetgarh area of RS Pura sector in Jammu district.

"At night the patrolling increases, there is vehicular patrolling... and it is done in

shifts and before the one shift finishes its duty, another takes over," said Dalip Singh, Sub Inspector, BSF yesterday.

At least four infiltration bids were thwarted during the last ten days along the 202 kilometres long Indo-Pak international border from Akhnour to Samba sector in Jammu.

On two occasions militants tried to smuggle arms and money by throwing it over the fence and they even cut the fence but surveillance gadgets alerted the personnel, who retaliated and foiled the attempt.

"During fog the visibility is very poor so instead of just putting up check posts, we are carrying out patrolling to cover a large part of the area

physically," said Suresh Kumar, BSF personnel.

After a period of relative calm, militants have stepped up attacks across Kashmir Valley.

On Thursday, the security agencies shot dead two militants holed up in a hotel in Srinagar after an almost two-day long gun battle that forced a mass evacuation of residents in the neighbourhood.

Meanwhile, Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir Omar Abdullah said in New Delhi on Saturday that Pakistan based militant organisation Lashker-e-Taiba is still active. Referring to the last two incidents where security forces gunned down four suspected Islamic rebels in two different locations of Indian Kashmir, Abdullah said Lashkar was involved in these incidents.

Gunmen fire at Pak minister's vehicle, driver killed

US drone strikes claim 4 more militants

PTI, AP, Islamabad/Peshawar/Miranshah

The driver of a provincial minister was killed when unidentified gunmen fired at his official vehicle in the southwestern Pakistani city of Quetta, police have said.

Salim Khosa, a minister of Baluchistan province, was not in the car at the time of the attack, he said.

The driver was going to the minister's official residence when the gunmen intercepted the vehicle and riddled it with bullets.

The driver was killed instantly. Police launched a search for the attackers, officials said.

Meanwhile, police say a bomb has exploded outside a provincial lawmaker's compound on the outskirts of the northwestern Pakistan city of Peshawar.

Police official Bashir Khan says nobody was harmed by Sunday's blast, which damaged a wall outside a building where lawmaker Aalimigir Khan often meets with guests.

Khan says police are trying to determine whether the bomb was remote-controlled or

detonated by a timer.

Peshawar has experienced a wave of attacks since mid-October, when the army launched a major ground offensive against the Pakistani Taliban's main stronghold in the South Waziristan tribal area.

Many of the militants fled the offensive and have been launching attacks throughout the country. More than 600 people have been killed in the past three months.

Earlier a US missile strike on Saturday killed at least four militants in Pakistan's lawless tribal belt, Pakistani security and intelligence officials said.

The missile struck a compound in Ismail Khel village, 40km west of Miranshah, the main town in North Waziristan tribal region on the Afghan border.

"A US drone fired two missiles, which hit a compound used by militants as a training centre," a senior security official told AFP.

He said that the identity of the militants was not immediately known, adding it was also not clear whether any high-value target was present in the area at the time of the strike.

Lanka sets free over 700 ex-LTTE cadres

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka on Saturday released more than 700 former Tamil Tiger fighters from military custody following a rehabilitation programme, an official said.

President Mahinda Rajapakse, who is touring the northern town of Vavuniya, handed over the ex-combatants to their immediate relatives, an army officer involved in the rehabilitation, Major General Daya Ratnayake, said.

"Out of some 12,000 Tiger combatants who are undergoing vocational training we have identified about 800 who had very minimal involvement with the Tiger movement," he added.

He said 713 out of the 800 identified for release were given over to their parents on Saturday while the others too

would be freed soon.

Some of the Tiger rebels surrendered to security forces while others were arrested from among nearly 300,000 war-displaced civilians who moved into state-run internment camps during the final stages of fighting last year.

About a third of ex-rebels are being trained in plumbing, masonry, carpentry and electrical work as part of their rehabilitation.

A few ex-combatants have been released in the past to travel overseas for migration or work, but their exact numbers are unknown.

The Tamil Tigers, who fought for a separate homeland from 1972, were defeated by Sri Lankan troops in mid-May when the military killed the top guerrilla leader Velupillai Prabhakaran.

Jyoti Basu slightly better

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calls, doctors attending on him said. The medical bulletin issued a little after noon Sunday said Basu's general condition was 'marginally better compared to yesterday, but still critical' and he continued to be on partial ventilator support.

On Saturday, the doctors had said the Communist Party of India-Marxist (CPI-M) veteran's health was deteriorating and he had slipped into a state of drowsiness with the infection affecting his internal organs. He was admitted Jan 1 to the AMRI hospital for pneumonia and shifted to the Intensive Cardiac Care Unit (ICCU) the following day.

The former West Bengal chief minister was put on ventilator Jan 6 after acute respiratory problems.

An eight-member medical committee overseeing his treatment said Basu's central nervous system was better than Saturday and he was 'responding to calls'. His cardiovascular function was 'more or less stable', with the blood pressure being maintained with stabilising medicines.

Basu's urine output has picked up under medication. There was no necessity of dialysis 'at this moment', the bulletin said.

Among the leaders to visit him Sunday were Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav and state CPI-M secretary Biman Bose.

Local leaders and supporters of the party were crowding the roads and pavements around the hospital for an update on his health.

Describing Basu as the country's greatest leader, Mulayam Singh said it was unfortunate the CPI-M did not allow him to become the prime minister in 1996 at the head of a United Front government. "Had he become prime minister, the prestige of the chair would have increased," he said.

A concerned Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited the hospital Thursday and has been monitoring the health condition of the veteran leader.

Following an offer from the prime minister to arrange for specialists, the medical board held a tele-conference with AIIMS experts Friday.

Basu holds the record for the longest 23-year-old stint as chief minister from June 1977 to November 2000. He stepped down voluntarily on health grounds.

India didn't know about Pak nuke for 14 years: AQ Khan

ANI, Rawalpindi

Pakistan's nuclear scientist Dr AQ Khan has revealed that 13-14 years after Pakistan acquired a nuclear bomb, India had no clue about Pakistan's nuclear power.

Recalling a 1998 statement by then Home Minister LK Advani that Pakistan should be submissive in talks with India because it was talking to a nuclear power, Khan said India perhaps did not know that Pakistan had become a nuclear power 13-14 years before. The News quoted Khan as saying that he told Indian journalist Kuldeep Nair that if India ever tried to bring some harm to Pakistan at any stage, Pakistan would strike back with all the might and India would have to face the consequences.



Nepalese bystanders gather in front of the wreckage of a bus which was set alight by activists of the National People's Front of Communist Party of Nepal in Kathmandu yesterday. The party called a strike in the capital city against the proposed federal structure in Nepal's new Constitution, which is being drafted as a part of the peace accord signed in 2006.

Terror threat to 10 Indian scientists

Govt tightens security

PTI, New Delhi

Security around 10 Indian scientists working in sensitive areas has been tightened in the wake of threats from Pakistan-based terror groups like Lashker-e-Taiba (LeT).

The scientists who have not been identified are working in crucial areas of nuclear, defence and space fields.

The names of these scientists was mentioned by Sarfaraz Nawaz, who was deported from Muscat, during interrogation and which were further corroborated by T Nazir, LeT's pointsman in South India. Sources said today that following corroboration of the threats, a security review was carried out after which it was decided to enhance the security of the scientists as a precautionary measures.

While Nawaz (33) was deported and brought back by security agencies from Muscat, Nazir was arrested along the Indo-Bangladesh border in Northeast recently. Both of them had played a key role in Bangalore blasts.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. When the Taliban were overthrown in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks, aid groups, analysts and Afghans themselves all believed the nation was finally emerging from a quarter century of war. In retrospect, there wasn't much of a break. "In those days people had hope, but unfortunately everything has turned upside down since then," said Hanif Hangam, who stars in an Afghan comedy TV show called Alarm Bell. "People expected things to go forward, but we've just been sliding back."

All water-sharing issues

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Hasina said the secretary level meeting of the Joint Rivers Commission (JRC) has been held, and the minister level meeting will be held next to resolve the issue of sharing Teesta water with India.

The prime minister put out a question for Khaleda Zia asking her why she did not speak about the unresolved issues with India, while her government was in power between 2001 and 2006.

She also asked why Khaleda did not speak up about sharing the water of common rivers during her visits to Delhi when she was in power.

Pointing out that it was the AL government which signed an agreement with India to share the water of Ganges in 1996, the prime minister said alluding to her political archrival Khaleda, "But when you were in power, you did not say a single word about sharing Teesta waters. Why you did not allow holding of JRC meetings back then?"

Hasina also asked Khaleda why she did not speak against Tipaimukh dam, and about the country's maritime boundary when she was in power.

"Why you always forget these issues when you are in power, and remember them and also remind others about them when in the opposition?" Hasina put out the question for Khaleda again.

"But this is good that at least you are speaking about these issues now, although from the opposition," Hasina added.

She said her government has not forgotten what it has to do for the interest of the country.

She said her government's foreign policy motto is to maintain good relations with all countries, including the neighbouring ones, and enmity with none.

Saying that her party activists suffered repression, torture, and killings by the BNP-Jamaat-led coalition regime after the 2001 elections, the premier declared that her government does not want to avenge those.

She said a commission has been formed with direction from the High Court to investigate the repression, killings, and the torture, and instructed the victims to inform the commission about their plights.

Speaking tough against criminal and militant activities, Hasina said her government will not allow those unlawful activities on the soil of the country. She also said her government plans to establish Bangladesh as a global model of peace and development.

AL presidium member and deputy leader of the parliament, Sayeda Sajeda Chowdhury, chaired the discussion where AL leaders Abdur Razzak, Tofail Ahmed, Suranjit Sengupta, Matia Chowdhury, Sheikh Fazul Karim Selim, Yusuf Hossain Humayun, and Satis Chandra Roy also spoke among others.

Afghans losing hope after 8 years of war

AP, Kabul

The man on the motorcycle was going the wrong way down a one-way street, gesturing indignantly for the palanquin of traffic-clogged cars in front of him to move.

"Brother, why are you angry with us?" said a passenger leaning out of one of the vehicles blocking his path. "It's you who are going the wrong way!"

"I'm not angry at you, I'm angry at Afghanistan," the man cried back, waving his arm dismissively as he negotiated his bike onto a crowded sidewalk and drove off in a trail of exhaust fumes. "These are sad days."

In Kabul, even a traffic jam can provoke a comment on this Islamic nation's dismal state, which

most people here believe is at its bleakest since the US invaded to topple the Taliban in 2001. It's a striking sentiment when you consider it comes after eight years of international intervention, \$60 billion in foreign aid and the lives of thousands of foreign troops and Afghan civilians.

The Obama administration is hoping to reverse that trend by pouring 30,000 more American troops into the conflict over the next few months. But "the more soldiers they send here, the worse it gets," said 19-year-old carpet seller Hamid Hashimi.

In the year after the Taliban fell, international forces numbered a modest 16,000. Today that number is already well over 100,000, and the insurgency has mushroomed along with it.

The war once mostly limited to Pakistan border

has touched nearly every corner of the country. It has also penetrated the frontier-like capital, where car bombings or other spectacular attacks like the October storming of a guest house filled with UN staff make news every couple of weeks.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. When the Taliban were overthrown in the wake of the Sept. 11 attacks, aid groups, analysts and Afghans themselves all believed the nation was finally emerging from a quarter century of war.

In retrospect, there wasn't much of a break.

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