

Revamp defence doctrine to combat terror

Manmohan says

AFP, New Delhi

India's prime minister yesterday called for an upgrade of the country's defence doctrine, warning of the growing threat posed by militant groups with access to the latest technology.

"Non-state actors are becoming increasingly fused and employing the best technologies to target open and democratic societies like ours," Manmohan Singh told a seminar on the 'Role of Force in Strategic Affairs.'

"We have to therefore modernise our defence doctrines to respond to new and non-traditional threats to our security," he said.

Singh's comments came after global consultancy firm KPMG earlier this week said New Delhi was expected to spend 116 billion dollars between now and 2016 on military acquisitions.

"Terrorist groups enjoy patronage and sanctuaries and do not lack in resources," Singh warned, stressing the need to maintain a logistical advantage over any groups planning to stage attacks on Indian soil or assets.

"We will ensure that our capabilities to combat terrorism remain a step ahead of those of the terrorists (and) they should be left in no doubt about our ability and resolve to defeat them," Singh said.

Media reports citing unnamed Western intelligence sources had said Al-Qaeda and Pakistan-based militant group Lashkar-e-Taiba had planned to attack New Delhi during the October 3-14 Commonwealth Games.

Singh's government turned the national capital into a fortress for the event with hundreds of thousands of police and paramilitary forces on guard.

India began shoring up its homeland security apparatus in the wake of the 2008 Mumbai attacks, in which 10 Pakistan-based militants killed 166 people.



An Afghan girl, from Kapisa province, stands outside a tent in a camp on Thursday east of Kabul, Afghanistan. People from the restive Kapisa province have fled to the camp in part because they are frightened of the Taliban fighters in the area.

PHOTO: AFP

Afghan insurgents: 'no hope' for talks

REUTERS, Kabul

Mid-level Taliban insurgency commanders do not believe their leaders have begun tentative peace talks with the Afghan government, with many vowing on Friday not to give up the fight after nearly 10 years of war.

Nato and Afghan officials have confirmed preliminary contacts between President Hamid Karzai's government and the Taliban, although doubt surrounds when those contacts were made, who they were made with and what, if any, progress was made.

Karzai is pushing a negotiated settlement to the conflict and has launched a High Peace Council which has said it is prepared to offer concessions to bring insurgents to the table, although Kabul and Washington are adamant they must renounce violence.

However, insurgency commanders

from across Afghanistan indicated they were not involved in the initial contacts.

"No one has come so far and sat with the government and there is no hope that the Taliban will come and negotiate with the government," said Abdullah Nasrat, the Taliban commander for Girishk district in southern Helmand province, one of the Taliban's traditional strongholds.

Girishk is in the strategically important Helmand River valley, along which mainly US and British forces launched a series of offensives last year.

"We basically hear the reports of talks through the press and do not believe in them," Nasrat told Reuters by telephone. "As long as foreign forces are in Afghanistan, there will be no talks. Our morale is high."

Violence across Afghanistan is at its worst since the Taliban were ousted by U.S.-backed Afghan forces in late 2001. Record civilian and military casualties --

and the possibility of peace talks -- will weigh heavily on U.S. President Barack Obama when he conducts a strategy review of the Afghan war in December.

It will also be a central part of discussions at a Nato summit in Lisbon next month.

The New York Times newspaper on Wednesday quoted an unidentified Afghan source as saying Taliban leaders from the "Quetta shura" -- the leadership of the Afghan Taliban who are based in Pakistan -- and one member of the al Qaeda-linked Haqqani network had taken part in "extensive" talks.

Salahuddin Ayoubi, a senior commander for the Haqqani network's Sirajuddin Haqqani, accused US General David Petraeus, the commander of the almost 150,000 foreign troops in Afghanistan, of trying to drive a wedge through the insurgency.

US to announce major military aid for Pak

BBC ONLINE

The US is set to announce a significant package of military and security aid to Pakistan on Friday, the final day of the latest US-Pakistan strategic talks.

The multi-year aid package will be "no-strings-attached", officials say.

But the Obama administration will make clear it expects Islamabad to do more in the fight against Islamic militants.

Since 2005, Pakistan has received more than \$1bn (£636.4m) of military aid a year from the US - and received close to \$2bn for the last fiscal year.

US officials said Pakistan needed further, specific assistance for the fight against militants and needed to know it could rely on the US in the long term.

The aid, expected to be close to \$2bn, will be contingent on approval by the US Congress and will pay for equipment needed in counter-insurgency and counter-terror operations, among other things.

'REDUCING THREATS TO US'

Vali Nasr, a senior adviser on Pakistan and Afghanistan at the state department, told the BBC that the battle against Pakistani militants had expanded over the last year, but the summer's monsoon floods had undone a lot of the Pakistani army's efforts.

"We believe that we have made a great deal

of progress and we believe that that progress has reduced the threat to our homeland, while not eliminating it," Richard Holbrooke, the US special representative on Afghanistan and Pakistan, said this week.

But officials in Washington have also been frustrated at the limits of Pakistan's desire and ability to help.

A White House report sent to Congress earlier this month laments the Pakistani army's inability to hold territory it has seized from insurgents, a failure that means gains are likely to be short-lived.

"The Pakistan military continued to avoid military engagements that would put it in direct conflict with Afghan Taliban or al-Qaeda's forces in North Waziristan," the report said, referring to the region in north-western Pakistan seen as a Taliban and al-Qaeda haven.

"This is as much a political choice as it is a reflection of an under-resourced military prioritising its targets."

The report also says the civilian leadership does not have the trust of the people and faces "broad-based" challenges that have "the potential to impact the stability of the government".

CROSS-BORDER ATTACK

Mr Nasr said the solution was not to withdraw US investment from Pakistan, but rather to help the Pakistani government and military strengthen the country's institutions.

Curfew imposed in parts of Kashmir

PTI, Srinagar

Curfew was yesterday imposed in parts of Kashmir Valley to prevent protests after Friday prayers as normal life was disrupted in Srinagar and some other areas following a separatist-sponsored strike.

The prohibitory orders were also imposed in Shopian district town in south Kashmir and Kupwara district town as also in Trehgam, Kralpora, Chotipora, Kulgam and Handwara in north Kashmir early yesterday. The situation was, however, under control.

"There is no report of any untoward incident from any place across the Valley," the spokesman said, adding there was no curfew in Budgam, Ganderbal, Kulgam, Pulwama, Baramulla and Bandipora districts.

Mosque bombing attack kills nine in Pakistan

AP, Peshawar

Bomb attacks in northwestern Pakistan killed nine people yesterday, including three worshippers at a mosque and a group of soldiers travelling through an area the military had pounded in a months-long offensive earlier this year.

The attacks showed the fragility of the military's gains in its offensives against al-Qaeda and Taliban insurgents along the border with Afghanistan. The United States is hoping to bolster Pakistan's fight against extremists with a surge in military funding expected to be announced yesterday.

In the first attack, a roadside bomb tore through a vehicle carrying paramilitary soldiers in the Orakzai tribal region, where the army recently declared victory over the Taliban.

The blast killed six soldiers, including a lieutenant colonel, and wounded three others, security officials said, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak on the record to media.

Hours later, a bomb hit a mosque on the outskirts of Peshawar, the capital of the northwestern province. Besides the three killed, 22 people were injured, said senior police official Liaquat Ali.

Musharraf approved US reconnaissance drones

Pak PM insists

AFP, Islamabad

Pakistan's prime minister revealed Friday for the first time that former military ruler Pervez Musharraf gave approval for US drones to make surveillance flights over the country.

"The previous government gave them permission for surveillance and reconnaissance flights by US drone aircraft but not to launch missile attacks," Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani told diplomatic correspondents.

The United States does not officially confirm the drone attacks, but the campaign is unpopular among the Pakistani public who see military action on Pakistani soil as a breach of national sovereignty.

Gilani said "we will find out" when asked about reports that US drones use Shamsi base in southwestern province Baluchistan, but denied that drones were taking off from a military base in southern province Sindh.

"We have not provided them space (to fly). This is wrong and I have contradicted that drones were using Shahbaz base (in Sindh) for this purpose."

A covert US drone campaign has dramatically increased the frequency of drone strikes in the tribal belt in response to intelligence claims of a Mumbai-style terror plot to launch commando

attacks on European cities.

Officials in Washington say drone strikes are highly effective in the war against Al-Qaeda and its Islamist allies, killing a number of high-value targets, including Pakistan's Taliban founding father Baitullah Mehsud.

But in Pakistan, anger over the attacks has fuelled reprisals from militant groups who have targeted Nato supply convoys destined for Afghanistan.

"We have repeatedly said the drone attacks are counter productive," Gilani told the group of local and foreign reporters.

"We want to have drone technology and also if they have any actionable intelligence, we want them to share it with us."

Mary Ellen O'Connell, a law professor at the University of Notre Dame in the United States, this week became the latest legal expert to warn that the drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen and other countries violate international law and should be halted.

"The use of drones is causing really serious anger in Pakistan. I really seriously question the necessity for what we are doing," she told London think-tank Chatham House.

Although he did not specify bombing raids by unmanned aircraft, CIA chief Leon Panetta has been quoted as telling US media that the agency's expanding operations in Pakistan have taken "a serious toll" on al-Qaeda.

Moon's water is useful resource, says Nasa

BBC ONLINE

There are oases of water-rich soil that could sustain astronauts on the Moon, according to Nasa.

Scientists studied the full results of an experiment that smashed a rocket and a probe into a lunar crater last year.

The impacts kicked up large amounts of rock and dust, revealing a suite of fascinating chemical compounds and far more water than anyone had imagined.

A Nasa-led team tells Science magazine that about 155kg of water vapour and water-ice were blown out of the crater.

The researchers' analysis suggests some areas of lunar regolith, or soil, must contain as much as 5% by weight of water-ice.

"That's a significant amount of water," said Anthony Colaprete, from the US space agency's Ames research centre.

"And it's in the form of water-ice grains. That's good news because water-ice is very much a friendly resource to work with. You don't have to warm it very much; you just have to bring it up to room temperature to pull it out of the dirt real easy."

"Just as a point of reference - in about a tonne of material, at about 5%, you're talking

11-12 gallons of water that you could extract."

The Nasa-led team has published six papers in the American journal describing the findings of the 9 October, 2009, impacts of the LCROSS spacecraft and its companion rocket stage.

The pair was targeted at the Moon's southern pole - at Cabeus Crater, a depression so deep and dark that the odds of disturbing ice were thought to be very good.

The rocket stage went in first, followed a few minutes later by the LCROSS probe which gathered imagery and other data just before it too slammed into the surface.

Another spacecraft, Nasa's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO), was passing close by. It also was able to study the plume of material ejected into sunlight more than 15km above the rim of Cabeus.

MOON'S 'ARCHIVE'

The suite of instruments deployed on that day has determined as much as 20 percent of this dust plume was made up of volatile compounds, including methane, ammonia, hydrogen gas, carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide.

In addition, the instruments saw relatively large amounts of some metals, such as sodium, and mercury. There was even a signature of silver, but this was tiny.



Kasab wants his case to be heard by int'l court

PTI, Mumbai

After the 26/11 attacks Ajmal Kasab and the nine other Pakistani terrorists had also planned to strike at Malabar Hills where the Raj Bhawan and the Chief Minister's residence are located, government counsel Ujjwal Nikam told the Bombay High Court today. Resuming his argument in the hearing for confirmation of Kasab's death sentence, Nikam said a map was found from slain terrorist Abu Ismail which showed Malabar Hills as their next destination.

Several VIPs stay in Malabar Hills. 23-year-old Kasab, the lone surviving Pakistani terrorist in the terror attacks, continued making fresh demands.

He wanted his case to be referred to an international court dealing with human rights violations, saying he does not expect justice from Indian courts.



Members of the Free Burma Coalition stage a protest in front of the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) in Manila yesterday, to show their support to Burma activists calling to boycott the upcoming November 7 multi-party elections in Burma.

PHOTO: AFP

Pakistan asks Obama to redeem the 'pledge' on Kashmir

IANS, Washington

Even as the US made clear that it considers Kashmir a bilateral issue, Pakistan yesterday bluntly asked President Barack Obama to intervene during his India visit and 'redeem the pledge' he made as a candidate.

'President Obama has always understood the importance of a Kashmir solution,' Pakistan's Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said at the start of the final day of the latest Washington-Islamabad strategic talks here.

'His coming visit to the region is the time to begin to redeem the pledge, that he made earlier,' he said minutes after Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announced a \$2 billion package of military aid to Pakistan to get tough with terrorists that threaten its neighbours, the world and Pakistan itself.

'It is in the US' strategic interest to work for peace, stability and resolution of the disputes in South Asia,' Qureshi said. 'The starting point in this quest is justice for the Kashmiri people.'

He said a recent crackdown against sus-

pected militants in Kashmir threatens peace and stability in South Asia and expressed astonishment that the US and other major powers had said little about India's response to the protests.

'People of conscience have protested the use of force against the defenceless people of Kashmir, in particular the targeting of the Kashmiri youth,' he said.

'But the Kashmiri mothers are baffled by the deafening silence of the world's leadership. History has proved that the force of arms cannot suppress the legitimate aspirations of the Kashmiri people.'

Qureshi's comments on Kashmir came even after the US publicly rejected Islamabad's request to intervene in the Kashmir dispute making clear that the issue should be resolved through bilateral talks between India and Pakistan.

'We recognise the importance of Kashmir to both India and Pakistan,' State Department spokesman PJ. Crowley told foreign media Thursday.