

TENSION IN KASHMIR LOC Indian air chief threatens Pakistan

PTI, New Delhi

Asserting that repeated ceasefire violations by Pakistan are "unacceptable", IAF chief Air Chief Marshal NAK Browne yesterday warned that India may have to look at "some other options for compliance" if such incidents continue.

"We have a Line of Control, we have a ceasefire agreement, we have certain structures and mechanisms which are sacrosanct and any violation of these with impunity especially what has been happening in the last few months is totally unacceptable.

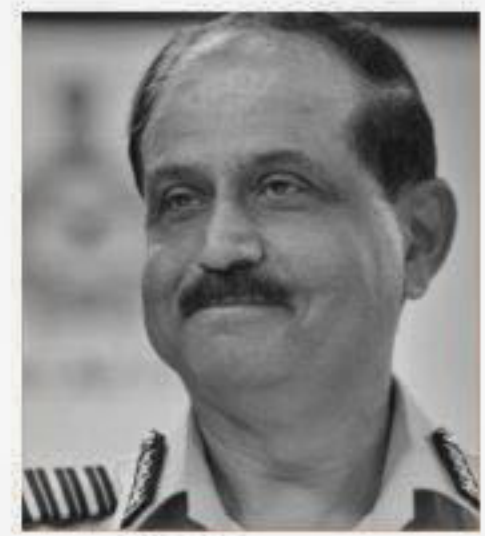
"We are monitoring the situation carefully because if these things continue to be the way they are and these violations continue to take place, then perhaps we may have to look at some other options for compliance," he told reporters here on the sidelines of an NCC function.

The IAF Chief, who is the senior most armed forces officer in the country, was asked about the suggestions he has given to the political leadership on the brutal killing of two Indian soldiers by Pakistan Army.

Refusing to divulge the options being looked at by the Government, he said, "Options are options. We do not discuss these options openly. If the violations continue, we may have to look at the whole issue all over again."

Asked how would the military leadership uphold the honour of soldiers such as the two jawans killed by Pakistan Army, he said, "When you join the armed forces, you hold certain ethos, values and certain traditions of the country which you have to uphold."

On January 8, Pakistan Army regulars had infiltrated inside Indian territory in Poonch sector of Jammu and Kashmir and killed and mutilated bodies of Lance Naiks Sudhakar Singh and Hemraj there.



NAK Browne

19 killed in French raid to free hostage

AFP, Paris

Two French soldiers died and 17 "terrorists" were killed in a failed bid to free a French hostage in southern Somalia from Islamists holding him since 2009, the French defence minister said yesterday.

The overnight operation was launched by France's elite DGSE secret service, Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said in a statement, adding that the raid was sparked by the "intransigence of the terrorists who have refused to negotiate for three and a half years and were holding Denis Alex in inhuman conditions."

But the Shebab extremists denied Le Drian's assertion that they had killed the hostage, a secret agent whose alias is Denis Alex, adding that they would decide his fate in two days and issuing a stern warning to Paris.

A Shebab statement said "in the end, it will be the French citizens who will inevitably taste the bitter consequences of their government's devil-may-care attitude towards hostages."

Russia urges Syria for political transition

Switzerland to file petition for
ICC to take up war crimes

AFP, Damascus

Russia called yesterday for a political transition in Syria, a day after peace envoy Lakhdar Brahimi met diplomats from Moscow and Washington and as the deadly conflict claimed yet more lives.

The outskirts of the capital were rocked by violence despite Friday's talks, the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said.

A day after UN-Arab League special envoy Brahimi met Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov and US Deputy Secretary of State William Burns, Moscow reiterated its long-held position that only Syrians can decide their own fate.

"In our opinion, the priority task is to immediately stop any violence and bloodshed as well as provide Syrians including internally displaced persons and refugees with humanitarian aid," a foreign ministry statement said.

But it also added: "At the same time it is necessary to secure the launch of a political transition process in Syria aimed at enshrining in law guaranteed and equal rights of all ethnic-confessional groups of this country."

Meanwhile, Switzerland will on Monday file a petition signed by 52 countries calling for the International Criminal Court (ICC) to open a case on war crimes in Syria, its foreign minister said.

"Serious war crimes are being committed in Syria. We must make sure they not go unpunished," Swiss Foreign Minister Didier Burkhalter told Swiss national television TSR on Friday.

"We're submitting a proposal, now it is up to the Security Council to decide," he added, saying the UN organ could either block or pursue the request.

Since Syria is not a party to the ICC, the world's only permanent war crimes tribunal, a UN Security Council referral is needed for the court to look into crimes committed in the now 22-month conflict.



KARZAI IN US US to speed up troop transition

REUTERS, Washington

President Barack Obama and Afghan President Hamid Karzai agreed on Friday to speed up the handover of combat operations in Afghanistan to Afghan forces, raising the prospect of an accelerated US withdrawal from the country and underscoring Obama's determination to wind down a long, unpopular war.

Signaling a narrowing of differences, Karzai appeared to give ground in talks at the White House on US demands for immunity from prosecution for any American troops who stay in Afghanistan beyond 2014, a concession that could allow Obama to keep at least a small residual force there.

Both leaders also threw their support behind tentative Afghan reconciliation efforts with Taliban insurgents, endorsing the establishment of a Taliban political office in Qatar in hopes of bringing insurgents to inter-Afghan talks.

Chinese painter portrays Tibet self-immolators

AP, Beijing

Beijing-based artist Liu Yi is working on a series of black-and-white portraits he knows will never be shown in a Chinese gallery. His varied subjects - men and women, young and old, smiling and pensive - have one thing in common: They are Tibetans who have set themselves on fire to protest repressive Chinese rule.

Liu wants to paint a portrait of each of the hundred-odd Tibetans who have self-immolated over the past three years, as a way of bearing witness to one of the biggest waves of fiery protests in recent history. With each brushstroke, Liu is making a heartfelt plea: The burning must end.

"When I'm painting, I'm thinking: 'Enough, enough, don't do this anymore. Stop,'" said the soft-spoken artist who has completed 40 so far. "That's enough."

Liu is rare among his contemporaries for addressing the largely taboo topic. Only a tiny handful of activists from the Han Chinese majority have spoken out, among them the prominent legal scholar Xu Zhiyong.

At the heart of the silence is Han Chinese indifference or even hostility to the Tibetan cause, despite some overlap with liberal Han activists who chafe at authoritarian controls. "We are victims ourselves," Xu wrote in a recent op-ed piece in which he apologized for the silence.

Many among the majority see the immolations as part of attempts to break away from China and wonder why Tibetans aren't more grateful for government development of their region with rail links, expressways, houses and factories.



Main culprits left out

FROM PAGE 20
Chakma with the district's Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court.

"If they [the Criminal Investigation Department] could ascertain [in the report] that she was 'abducted willingly or unwillingly', they should also be able to say who abducted her and how," Jewel told The Daily Star.

On the night of June 12, 1996, the day before that year's national elections, Kalpana, the then organising secretary of Hill Women's Federation, was taken away by a few men from her house at New Lalayaghona in Baghaichhari, Rangamati in the presence of her two brothers.

Widespread protests against alleged involvement of the military in the forced disappearance, national and international outcries and deaths of four adivasi protesters led to three official investigations but the mystery revolving around it has remained unresolved.

"Even though my brother Lalbihari and I identified Lieutenant

Ferdous and VDP [Village Defence Party] personnel Nurul Haque and Saleh Ahmed as among those involved, their names were deliberately left out from the probe report," said Kalindi, an eyewitness to the abduction.

The CID in its report presented in September, 2012 said the investigation could not dig up the whereabouts of Kalpana and even failed to ascertain if she was dead or alive.

"During my investigation, Kalpana could not be rescued for a lack of testimonies or evidence," Mohammad Shahidullah, a CID official who led the probe, said in the report. Despite all-out efforts, including deployment of informers, nothing about her could be known, he added.

It was impossible for the CID to identify the abductors because of a lack of conclusive evidence, the report says.

Kalpana's family and indigenous rights activists have been insisting that the military was involved in her abduction. Her resistance against military presence in the Chittagong Hill Tracts and supporting the autonomy-oriented movement, Jana Sanghati Samiti (JSS), had made her a target of the Bangladesh army, they said. At the time of the incident, she was campaigning on behalf of an independent candidate known to have ties with JSS.

There have been various attempts from different quarters, including the investigation teams, to protect the army, said Kalindi.

"It is clear from the way our statements have been distorted in the reports."

On analysing the testimonies of the witnesses, the CID probe team in the report said, only witness Lalbihari, who is Kalpana's own brother, named three people as abductors but the rest could not provide any name or address.

"It is the responsibility of the state to figure out what happened to one of its citizens," advocate Jewel Dewan, coordinator of BLAST, Rangamati, said.

The report of the second probe done by police was also rejected in September,

2010 on the same grounds.

For police's failure to identify the abductors and trace her, Kalpana's brother Kalindi at that time filed a petition, in response to which M Shariful Islam, Rangamati chief judicial magistrate, ordered further investigation.

Earlier in 1996, about three months after the abduction, the government formed a three-member inquiry commission led by retired judge Abdul Jalil.

The committee's findings, despite repeated demands from rights groups, were not officially published. The report, however, has recently been made available on the internet.

The report concludes, "Kalpana Chakma was willingly or unwillingly abducted but it has not been possible for us to identify the abductors for a lack of witnesses and evidence. And there remains no ground to recommend that legal action should be taken against anyone."

The military has categorically denied any link with Kalpana's disappearance.

Initially, rumours were circulated by certain quarters that Lieutenant Ferdous and Kalpana had eloped but then there was no evidence of it. So, the rumours were soon dismissed.


The military then announced that it would give a Tk 50,000 bounty to the person who could give information about Kalpana.

In a statement in July 1996, it said Kalpana had fled the country, using her passport.

To substantiate that claim, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) within about a month arranged a press conference to say that Kalpana had been seen in Tripura, India and that she had faked her own abduction. It, however, had no proof to that effect.

The Agartala-based Humanity Protection Forum found the NHRC claims baseless and false upon investigation.

Indigenous rights activists argued that those allegations were meant to mislead people and distract attention from the real perpetrators.


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