

FOCUS-India says Afghans in Kashmir intrusion.By **Chaitanya Kalbag**

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NEW DELHI, May 25 (Reuters) - Afghan mercenaries, likely commanded by Pakistani army officers, have dug themselves into high positions on India's side of a ceasefire line dividing Kashmir, a senior Indian defence official said on Tuesday.

Three weeks of sharp skirmishing has raised temperatures between the hostile nuclear-armed neighbours and left 17 Indians dead and 90 wounded, but the Indian official said he would stop short of calling it war.

"It is an act of aggression," he told Reuters. "It is extremely irresponsible behaviour. It cannot be happening without the sanction of Pakistan's political leadership."

The official, who did not want to be identified, denied there had been an intelligence failure on India's part in detecting the infiltration by about 400 guerrillas from the Pakistani side.

"You could call it a temporary surprise," the official said.

India has been caught off guard by the fierce fighting just inside its side of the so-called Line of Actual Control that divides Kashmir between India and Pakistan.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, who heads a caretaker government, was briefed by Indian army commanders on Monday on the fighting. Vajpayee has been accused by the main opposition group, Congress, of neglecting national security.

Later on Tuesday, the Press Trust of India (PTI) quoted Vajpayee as saying he had spoken to his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif over telephone and had told him India would not allow intrusion in the Kargil sector.

"In my talks with Pakistan prime minister yesterday, I had made it clear that we will not allow any intrusion to take place in our territory," PTI quoted Vajpayee as saying.

"All possible steps would be taken to clear our territory of intrusion," Vajpayee said.

"We are facing a new challenge in the Kargil sector. It is not just intrusion which takes place when the snow starts melting. This time the design is to occupy some territory and stay put there. Infiltrators are being helped by Pakistan armed forces. The situation is totally unacceptable to us."

Drawing a detailed picture of the flare-up along the 720-km (450-mile) ceasefire line in the Kargil sector of Indian-held Kashmir, the official said the guerrillas were led by Pakistani army officers.

He said Pakistan-trained militants routinely infiltrated India's part of Kashmir every summer to stage raids, but this time there had been a major change. "This time they've stayed put."

"They are receiving artillery support from the Pakistani side. We have noticed helicopters taking in supplies," he said.

The Pakistani incursion had occurred along a glaciated stretch between 10,000 and 17,000 feet (3,000 and 5,000 metres) high, and the Afghan "irregulars" had dug themselves in about half a dozen elevated positions along a 120-km (75-mile) stretch of the ceasefire line, the official said.

He said the Pakistani objective appeared to be to cut off the strategic road that connects Srinagar, the summer capital of India's Kashmir, to Kargil town and beyond it to Leh, the headquarters of India's Ladakh district.

He said India had succeeded in containing the infiltrators in pockets. "We have inflicted heavy casualties on them."



Earlier an Indian army spokesman said Pakistan continued to fire across the military control line.

Of the infiltrators, the spokesman said: "Their present number is 250 to 300, the others were killed."

Pakistani officials declined to comment on developments in hostilities in the Kargil and Drass areas.

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"Our PBIT (profit before interest and tax) has grown 25 percent," Devashwar told Reuters. "Our trading results are very healthy, and I am pleased with our results."

TTC spokeswoman Aditya Syam told Reuters profit before interest and tax, but after depreciation, rose 25 percent to 10.92 billion rupees from 8.73 billion.

"Because in the last two years we have dealt with the problems of our associated companies, the interest burden has gone up," Devashwar said. "We were sorting out the mess."

TTC's interest outgoings rose to 1.54 billion rupees in 1998/99 from \$10.2 million in the previous year. Net profit rose to 8.27 billion rupees in 1998/99 from 5.75 billion the previous year.

TTC, owned 31.7 percent by British American Tobacco Plc, has restructured its operations to focus on cigarettes where it is competitive. Devashwar told a business conference last month that the firm had been handsomely rewarded after the restructuring which involved its exit from the financial services and edible oils businesses. ((Chaitanya Kallag, New Delhi Newroom +91-11-301-2020 Fax +91-11-301-4043 delhinewroom@reuters.com))

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