

India vows no pause in Kashmir assault for talks.By **Chaitanya Kalbag**

568 words

1 June 1999

22:59

Reuters News

English

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NEW DELHI, June 1 (Reuters) - India will not halt its air and ground assault against "infiltrators" in Kashmir even if Pakistan's foreign minister arrives in New Delhi for talks on the crisis, senior Indian officials said on Tuesday.

"There is no pre-condition" for the talks with Pakistani Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz, one official told reporters.

"But let it be clear to the Pakistan government - we are not going to stop our operations; there will be no pause to facilitate dialogue."

Tensions between India and Pakistan are at their highest level in 30 years after New Delhi launched air strikes last Wednesday on its side of the ceasefire line against the infiltrators.

Nothing has moved on the diplomatic front. India's foreign ministry reported no progress after Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Monday accepted an offer from Pakistan to send Aziz for talks.

The officials, who spoke on condition they not be identified, said Indian forces in Kashmir were operating in a "well calibrated" manner.

"Our constraints are self-imposed, not out of weakness. Our forces are operating in a very calibrated manner to ensure this does not escalate (into full-scale war) and even at a cost to themselves."

The officials said there was no danger of the nuclear capable neighbours sliding into their fourth war since independence in 1947.

"This is not 1948. This is not 1965. This is not 1971. This is 1999," one senior official said.

"There is a certain responsibility. You don't want to escalate because you are aware of the implications."

The officials said Pakistan's plan to infiltrate a large number of heavily armed men into India's side of the Kashmir ceasefire line in the Drass, Kargil and Batalik sectors had been exposed because the snow melted early this year from high passes.

"Their plan to cut off the highway linking Srinagar to Kargil was foiled. We have been moving troops along that road for the past four days."

One senior official said after leaders of the two countries signed the Shimla Agreement in 1972, accepting a 1949 ceasefire line as the dividing frontier in Kashmir, officials of the two countries met for six rounds of talks.

"Both sides agreed on 19 specific maps delineating the Line of Control. There was a detailed description of the terrain with grid references."

Both countries had not permanently manned the barren, icy heights where the fighting is now concentrated because of the inhospitable terrain, the officials said. "Once you have an agreed border, you only have the basic elements of border control."

The officials said there was a series of high, icy ridges leading from the Line of Control towards Indian territory. "You would need a colossal number of troops to man each height. Then why have a Line of Control at all?"

One official said there was ample evidence pointing to active Pakistan Army involvement in the infiltrations. Pakistan denies the charge.

"We are absolutely certain there is a regular pattern of support, backed by Pakistani observation posts. The intruders are using signal frequencies used by the Pakistan army."



Indian reconnaissance photographs showed the infiltrators had set up rows of pup tents in "beautiful, military rows", the official said.

"These are no ordinary intruders. No riff-raff can fight at 16,000 feet."

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New Delhi, May 30 (Reuters) - A top Indian official said on Sunday it was up to Pakistan to decide whether to step back from a growing conflict in Kashmir if the nuclear-armed neighbour were to step back from a growing conflict in Indian territory.

"When other countries ask us to exercise restraint, we tell them: Please do and tell Pakistan to do the same," said Bijesh Mishra, principal secretary and national security adviser to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Mishra told Reuters in a telephone interview that India would press on with its air-and-ground offensive to drive hundreds of well-armed infiltrators from Indian Kashmir's high ridges.

"Let there be no mistake - this was an armed incursion by Pakistan into Indian territory," said Mishra. "The so-called mercenaries have been thoroughly controlled and directed by the Pakistani army. We have enough evidence of that."

"We are determined to restore the status quo ante. That is the bottom line."

Mishra admitted India had been taken by surprise by the extent and size of the infiltration, which differed from previous years when small bands of guerrillas crested into Indian Kashmir to stage hit-and-run attacks.

"Obviously we did not assess the situation properly," he said. "But for nearly three decades there was no enemy on those high ridges on our side of the LOC (line of control). The terrain is so horrendous you don't expect this sort of incursion."

He brushed aside a question about a failure of India's intelligence machinery. "This is not the time for a post-mortem," he said.

When would India respond to a proposal by Pakistan to send its foreign minister, Sartaj Aziz, to New Delhi for talks to defuse the Kashmir crisis, Mishra said:

"We are always willing to welcome dialogue, but what is the purpose of dialogue? If the purpose is to agree that Pakistan is entirely responsible for this situation and if Pakistan says 'Let us take back our men' then that is fine."

Mishra, a former diplomat, said there was a serious lack of consensus in Pakistan on policy towards India, and recalled the warmth between Vajpayee and his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif when the two met in Lahore for a pathbreaking summit only three months ago.

"It is very clear to us now that when we were being received in Lahore, preparations were already going on for an armed incursion into our territory," Mishra said.

Could the stand-off in Indian Kashmir's Dras-Kargil-Batalik sectors might develop into a long, bruising, protracted war of attrition between the arch-rivals, similar to their skirmishes on the high and hostile Siachen Glacier in the north, Mishra said:

"I don't think it will. But if it does, we have the resources to handle that sort of situation. Pakistan doesn't."

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