

India's Fernandes insists Pakistan PM was in dark.By **Chaitanya Kalbag**

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NEW DELHI, May 31 (Reuters) - India's Defence Minister George Fernandes said on Monday he had "irrefutable evidence" that Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif had been kept in the dark by his military commanders about the Kashmir infiltration.

But Fernandes, speaking to Reuters in an interview, said he did not want to elaborate on the evidence. "I don't think it would be wise to do it at this point."

"This is an operation in which it is evident that the (Pakistan) government has not been involved but it is the Pakistani military that has taken the initiative, keeping even the prime minister in the dark," Fernandes said.

"I am saying this with the knowledge that the Pakistan prime minister was kept in the dark. There is irrefutable evidence to that effect."

He said he was also convinced Pakistan's Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) agency was not kept informed by military commanders.

"As far as the ISI is concerned, the ISI which is well known for its activities...in our country, even the ISI is not involved in this operation, it is the army which has taken the initiative."

But Sharif must have had to go along with the military's plans for Kashmir once the infiltration became clear, Fernandes said.

"I am aware that once the whole exercise began then the Pakistani prime minister also was obviously brought into the picture because in an operation of this type when you move into another country you have to be brought into the picture."

"This is not to say that the prime minister is today away from this operation. Nor does it mean that the ISI is not involved in both overt and covert operations in various parts of our country including Kashmir."

Fernandes said it was significant that Pakistan's army, which said it was not involved in Kashmiri separatists' forays into Indian-controlled territory, were themselves briefing the media every day on the fighting in the disputed region.

"I don't think they are trying to hide behind any fig leaf this time," he said.

Asked if Sharif's plan to send his foreign minister Sartaj Aziz to New Delhi for talks on Kashmir would yield results, Fernandes said: "I am sure something should come out of it. I also hope that the Pakistan prime minister has some ideas on how he wants to get out of this situation created by his army."

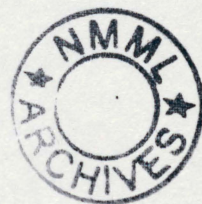
"I do hope he (Aziz) is coming here with a view to resolve this matter."

He said there was no other way but for Pakistan to pull out the infiltrators from Kashmir.

"If they don't pull them back, they will be either eliminated or flushed out. There is no other way."

Asked why the friendship generated in February, when Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee rode a bus to the Pakistan city of Lahore for a pathbreaking meeting with Sharif, had dissipated so quickly, Fernandes said:

"Obviously there are parts of the Pakistani establishment who do not relish the idea of peace between India and Pakistan and a peaceful way of resolving whatever differences we have. Otherwise it doesn't make any sense."



"After all the Pakistani prime minister signs the Lahore Declaration (in February). The whole world applauds him and our prime minister. Within both countries there is a certain sense of relief, there is also a certain sense of jubilation and great expectations."

He said both sides had suddenly begun to see the advantages of economic cooperation.

"The Pakistan Chamber of Commerce sends a delegation. Our industrialists go there. In quick steps all this happens."

"Now, would that prime minister (Sharif) at the same time plan covert action even while he is making all these moves, and destroy all that?"

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