

Dialogue has to be 2-way, says Jaswant

BY CHAITANYA KALBAG

New Delhi, June 1: Indian foreign minister Jaswant Singh said on Tuesday there would be "no relenting" on air and ground operations in Kashmir, and accused Pakistan's military of connivance with "armed intruders."

"There will be no relenting on any ground operations or air operations until status quo ante is restored," Mr Singh told Reuters in an interview. "I think what has been committed against India is an armed intrusion and armed aggression."

He said he could not predict how the latest flare-up would affect attempts by New Delhi and Islamabad to resolve a host of differences through a series of talks. "Dialogue is a two-way process. I cannot conduct a monologue and call it a dialogue. And it really depends on how my friend from Pakistan (foreign minister Sartaj Aziz) will approach it. We have a long-term commitment (to

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peace)," he said. Mr Singh said he had received telephone calls from both US secretary of state Madeleine Albright and British foreign secretary Robin Cook. "What was striking and noteworthy is that both of them categorically said this issue must be settled bilaterally, and added that they have communicated that to Pakistan in unambiguous terms. They did advise restraint," he said. Mr Singh said he did not know why Pakistan had provoked a crisis just months after Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and his Pakistan counterpart Nawaz Sharif had agreed in Lahore to resolve disputes in an amicable manner. "It is one of the aspects that I do wish to enquire of my counterpart from Pakistan. I am deeply disappointed and it is something that I do wish to enquire, 'Why have you chosen to enter upon this misadventure at this time.' I do believe that such an intrusion could neither have been planned, nor executed, nor supported in the fashion in which it has been supported without the active connivance and support of the Pakistani armed forces."

Asked about fears in India's financial markets that the conflict might escalate into full-scale war, he said: "Let me rest all doubts. There shall be no escalation as far as India is concerned. Secondly this is a thriving economy. And it is in a tiny segment of India... that this trouble is taking place. We have the resilience to absorb such problems and cause no consequence to the Indian economy, certainly not to the dynamism of the Indian markets. I am very bullish." (*Reuter*)