

Bush intensifies foreign diplomacy

By Jonathan S. Landay
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WASHINGTON — Alarmed by a growing threat of war, President Bush demanded Thursday that Pakistan's military ruler make good on his pledges to stop Islamic guerrillas from crossing into the Indian-controlled side of the disputed Kashmir region.

Gen. Pervez Musharraf "must stop the incursions across the Line of Control. He must do so. He said he would do so," Bush said. The Line of Control is the militarized boundary between the Indian- and Pakistani-held portions of Kashmir.

Bush also announced he was sending Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld to South Asia next week for talks with Indian and Pakistani leaders.

The intensified diplomacy reflected fears that a war between India and Pakistan could escalate into a nuclear exchange that would kill millions of people. U.S. officials also are worried that the crisis is hurting the war on terrorism by diverting Pakistan's attention from the hunt for Osama bin Laden and members of his al-Qaeda terrorist network.

Bush's comments suggested that the United States has yet to detect any concrete moves by Musharraf to prevent Islamic militants based in Pakistan from joining guerrillas fighting to end India's control of two-thirds of Kashmir, which like Pakistan is predominately Muslim.

Bush signaled that he expects Musharraf to take the first step toward defusing a crisis over Kashmir.

"We are making it very clear to both Pakistan and India that war will not serve their interests," Bush said. "And we're part of an international coalition applying pressure to both parties, particularly to President Musharraf."

Bush also asserted that al-Qaeda would gain no advantage from the crisis. Many al-Qaeda members have escaped from their old bases in Afghanistan and are believed to have found refuge in Pakistan's cities and lawless tribal areas.

"They shouldn't think they're going to gain any advantage as a result of any conflict between Indian and Pakistan, because we're still going to hunt them down," Bush said.

U.S. officials hope India will step back from the brink of war after Musharraf demonstrates that he has stopped the cross-border infiltration and other support Pakistan has been giving the militants. The next step would be talks to resolve differences. India and Pakistan have fought three wars since they won independence from Britain in 1947.

India and Pakistan conducted successful nuclear weapons tests in 1998. Altogether, they have deployed about 1 million troops along their border. Daily exchanges of

mortar and artillery barrages have killed dozens of people and forced tens of thousands of people to flee their homes.

Britain, Russia, Japan and other countries are joining in the diplomatic effort to avert a war. U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage will visit India and Pakistan June 6 and 7, just before Rumsfeld is scheduled to arrive in the region.

In case diplomacy fails, the U.S. government is reviewing how it would get Americans out of the two countries safely.

U.S. military planners are in India and Pakistan reviewing evacuation plans to make sure they are current, said Marine Corps Gen. Peter Pace, the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

About 60,000 Americans are believed to be in India and several thousand in Pakistan, said State Department spokesman Richard Boucher. They include some 1,100 U.S. troops stationed at three bases in Pakistan in support of the U.S.-led military operations in Afghanistan.

The State Department last week urged Americans to put off visits to India and Pakistan and told Americans already in those countries to consider leaving.

Rumsfeld said he did not know what leverage the United States could use on India and Pakistan.

"It seems to me that what you have is two countries, each of which has a great many conventional forces and nuclear power as well. It is in their interest as much as anybody's" to settle the differences peacefully, Rumsfeld said at a Pentagon news conference.

The upsurge in tensions between India and Pakistan began May 14, when Islamic guerrillas slaughtered 34 people, many of them wives and children of Indian soldiers, in a raid on a military camp on the Indian-controlled side of Kashmir.

India's Hindu nationalist-dominated ruling coalition threatens military operations against Pakistan unless Musharraf halts the infiltration into Indian-controlled Kashmir by Islamic militants waging a 12-year-old insurgency for independence from New Delhi.

India contends that Pakistan provides bases, training and arms for the Kashmiri insurgents as part of a proxy war aimed at gaining Pakistan full control over the region. Pakistan says it provides only political and moral support for the militants.

(Knight Ridder Newspapers correspondent Drew Brown contributed to this report.)
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