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Gen Ahsan seeks US help in civil N-tech

Friday, November 17, 2006

BRUSSELS: Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee (CJCS) Chairman Gen Ehsan ul Haq said on Thursday the United States should extend civilian nuclear cooperation beyond India and include Pakistan, arguing the economic growth of the country would help defeat extremism and terrorism.

Gen Ehsan said Washington was discriminatory in its approach when it offered New Delhi a wide-ranging agreement on civilian nuclear cooperation. Instead of considering such cooperation with specific countries, he said it should be open to all countries that meet specific standards.

"There should be a criteria approach. And if any country fulfils the criteria, it should have access to those technologies," the CJCS said in an interview with The Associated Press. "Pakistan badly needs nuclear energy to feed the surging economy," he said, adding that the Pakistani government was targeting a 20-fold increase in nuclear energy output over the next 25 years.

The economy currently grows at some seven per cent per year and Gen Ehsan hoped that boosting that growth through nuclear power will reduce poverty and, hence, extremism which can lead to terrorism. "If there is no cooperation on civilian nuclear energy, it will seriously impact on our economic development and ... undermine our abilities to address the issues of extremism, which thrives on economic deprivation."

Pakistan has had close cooperation with China on nuclear energy but the CJCS said it might not suffice. "We feel they may not be able to fill all of our requirements," he said, and added that China had already provided one reactor and was building a second, "yet there is a need to look to Washington", too.

"Any holding back on the economic front, or the creation of barriers on the nuclear energy front, will be counterproductive and disastrous for us on many counts," Gen Ehsan said earlier at a conference organised by the British-based South Asian Strategic Stability Institute.

Gen Ehsan believes in the potential of Pakistan also becoming another Asian economic giant, much like India, and deserves equal treatment from the United States. "We

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feel discrimination will be counterproductive," he told the conference.

He also told the conference that Pakistan had taken the extra ordinary steps to strengthen export controls over its nuclear capability, saying Pakistan's acquisition of nuclear capability was entirely a defensive response to legitimate national security needs.

The overarching policy of Pakistan is and will remain credible minimum nuclear deterrence, Gen Ehsan said, adding: "The emergence of a nuclear South Asia is a reality, Pakistan and India as well as the rest of the world has to live with it."

The top Pakistani general is here for ground-breaking talks at the Nato headquarters this week in an effort to improve military cooperation between its forces and Nato troops across the border in Afghanistan. "There has been fairly good cooperation. We are trying to further enhance this cooperation with better liaison arrangements," Gen Ehsan said in the interview. "We hope that we will achieve that soon."

"It's very difficult to make an assessment of the strength of the Taliban," he said. "Of course there has been intensification of the activities there, but there are several factors responsible for that."

He said followers of the ousted Taliban regime were not the only threat facing Nato troops in the south. "Frankly speaking, the term Taliban is being used as a blanket coverage for lots of the anti-government, anti-social activities of a lot of elements, whether they be warlords or drug barons or other forms of disgruntled people."

In a separate interview with Reuters, Gen Ehsan ul Haq urged India to move to solve the stand-off over the Siachen glacier. "It's for the Indians to do something, they are in adverse occupation of that area, we don't have to do anything." In response to a question, he said there was no infiltration by Jihadis in Kashmir. "The Indians themselves are acknowledging that," he said.

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