

We have to do our job: Army chief

Army chief General Bipin Rawat at a press conference on Friday ahead of Army Day.V.V. Krishnan

The Chief of the Army Staff, General Bipin Rawat, said here on Friday that it would be premature to say the suspension of aid by the U.S. to Pakistan would tip the balance in favour of India.

“It would be premature to say that everything is going to be in our favour, and the U.S. will do our job vis-à-vis Pakistan. We have to do our own job,” Gen. Rawat said at the annual press conference ahead of Army Day, January 15.

Last week, the U.S. suspended all security assistance to Pakistan until it “takes decisive action against groups, including the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani Network”.

Ceasefire situation

Gen. Rawat said Pakistan did not want the situation along the Line of Control to escalate; so it was calling for a ceasefire. “If a task is given to us, we cannot say we will not cross the border because they [Pakistan] have nuclear weapons. We have to call their bluff,” he said.

Gen. Rawat called for a multi-pronged approach to deal with an assertive China, including diplomatic and military efforts, besides partnerships with other countries in the region. “We understand China is a powerful country, but we are not a weak nation ... We are looking at the whole of government approach which is — diplomatic and military — and partnering with other countries ... Diplomatic engagement with China is happening very well ... Focus has to shift to the northern borders, for too long we have focused on western borders,” he said.

He stressed the importance of the neighbourhood as part of efforts to build partnerships with like-minded countries. “We are not getting into alliances, but we are seeking the support of the other group of nations in the region so that we are not isolated against an assertive China ... One important aspect of it is our neighbourhood. We cannot let our neighbourhood drift away from us.”

At the same time, he said, the country should start preparing for the next kind of warfare which would be cyber and information.

Pressure on border

Admitting that China was mounting pressure on the border, Gen. Rawat said India was prepared to deal with any situation and troops had been earmarked.

He said China had been constructing roads for many years in North Doklam, which is caught in a dispute between Bhutan and China. “With China, we have an agreement not to change status quo ... This was a change of status quo by bringing the road down, so we intervened.”

While temporary structures remained, there was a visible reduction in the number of troops recently either because of the winter or China wanted to de-escalate. “They may come back here after winter or somewhere else. Should they come again, we will see what to do,” he said.

Gen. Rawat said diplomatic efforts were under way and border demarcation talks were on between Bhutan and China.

Schools corrupted

On the radicalisation of the youth in Kashmir, Gen. Rawat said schools played a major part in the situation, besides social media, and called for a major revamp of the education system.

“The grassroots problem is here. The education system in government schools in Jammu and Kashmir has been corrupted. The teachers were also brought up in the same system,” the Army chief said.

With the government imposing a cap of Rs. 10,000 a year on tuition fees for children of the disabled soldiers and those killed in line of duty, the Army decided to set up schools, he said.

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