

Nawaz Sharif calls meeting, says SIT may go to Pathankot

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Islamabad: Pakistan on Wednesday detained Jaish-e-Muhammad chief Maulana Masood Azhar, his brother and "several individuals" belonging to his dreaded outfit, which is suspected to have engineered the Pathankot terror attack, and sealed its offices after India demanded action, linking it to the fate of the Foreign Secretary-level talks.

Lt Gen (retired) Abdul Qadir Baloch, minister for frontier regions, confirmed that "Azhar was arrested". Azhar was taken in protective custody to probe the Pathankot attack, Baloch was quoted as saying by Geo TV.

Azhar's brother Abdul Rehman Rauf has also been detained, Geo TV said.

Officials said Azhar, one of the three terrorists released from Indian prisons in 1999 in exchange for the release of 155 passengers of a hijacked Indian Airlines plane, has been taken into protective custody after raids on several JeM offices.

Pakistan has also said it's considering sending a Special Investigation Team to Pathankot as more information would be required to carry forward the process of cooperation with India.

The Pakistani action, which was reviewed at a high-level meeting chaired by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, come as the fate of the FS-level talks scheduled for Friday hung in balance with just two days for Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar to go to Islamabad for talks with his counterpart on resuming the bilateral dialogue process.

Terrorists belonging to the JeM are believed by India to be behind the Pathankot terror attack on January 2 in which seven security personnel were killed.

A PMO statement issued after the meeting said it noted with satisfaction that as part of Pakistan's commitment to eliminate terrorism from its soil and the expressed national resolve not to allow its territory to be used for acts of terrorism anywhere, 'considerable progress has been made in the investigations being carried out against terrorist elements reportedly linked to the Pathankot incident'.

"Based on initial investigations in Pakistan, and the information provided, several individuals belonging to Jaish-e-Mohammad have been apprehended. The offices of the organisation are also being traced and sealed. Further investigations are underway," the statement said.

In the spirit of cooperative approach, the statement said, it was also decided that "in order to carry the process forward, additional information would be required for which the government of Pakistan is considering sending a Special Investigation Team to Pathankot in consultation with the Government of India".

"The meeting reiterated that in line with our decision to counter and completely eliminate terrorism, Pakistan would remain engaged with India on this issue," the statement said.

Army chief Gen Raheel Sharif, Director General ISI Lt Gen Rizwan Akhtar, Interior Minister Nisar Ali Khan, Finance Minister Ishaq Dar, Advisor on Foreign Affairs Sartaj Aziz, Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif and other senior officials attended the meeting.

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