

Pakistan facing growing threat of Islamic State: IB chief

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Islamabad: In a rare admission, Pakistan's Intelligence Bureau Chief today said the country was facing growing threat from the Islamic State as hundreds of Pakistanis have travelled to Syria to join the terror outfit.

"There are reports of fighters being recruited by sectarian and other outfits, and being sent to Syria. The number of people leaving from Pakistan to Syria to join IS are in hundreds," Director General Intelligence Bureau (IB) Aftab Sultan said.

Addressing a Senate Standing Committee on interior affairs and narcotics control, Aftab said IB was locating militants in the country and carrying out arrests.

He also confirmed trend among militants to leave for Syria for fighting despite "successes" in dismantling militant networks.

He said local banned militants groups including Tekreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashker-e-Jhangvi (LJ) and Sipaha-e-Sihaba have a soft corner for the Islamic State terror group also known Dai'sh.

"Pakistan Taliban support Dai'sh while Afghan Taliban are against it," he said.

Aftab said militancy was going down but the threat remains.

"Terrorists are on the run. Civilian security and intelligence set-ups are augmenting and implementing operation Zarb-e-Azb in cities," he added.

The admission by IB chief about presence of ISIS came after a string of denials by officials about its footprints in Pakistan.

"We have seen media reports that certain elements trying to associate themselves with Da'ish have been arrested and that investigations are going on," Foreign Office spokesman Qazi Khalilullah had said during a briefing last month as he dismissed the reports.

Military and official of interior ministry have also made similar denials.

Further, DG Inter-Services Public Relations Lieutenant General Asim Bajwa last year said Pakistan has "zero tolerance" for the emerging militant group.

"Not even a shadow of Daish will be allowed in Pakistan," and Pakistani society had rejected the IS, and there was no acceptance of the terror group in the country, he had said.

- PTI