

Pakistani Army backs government's initiatives in tribal areas

The Pakistani Army fully backs the newly-elected government's peace initiatives in the restive tribal areas in the north, a senior officer has said.

'The army is a part of the government and is fully on board in the peace process now under way in the tribal areas and Swat,' Peshawar Corps Commander Lt. Gen. Muhammad Masood Aslam told reporters Saturday in the North West Frontier Province capital.

The army would seek directions from the government for the resolution of various issues in the conflict-hit areas, he added.

Aslam maintained that the army was called in by the then NWFP government to be deployed in Swat due to the deteriorating law and order situation.

'We will withdraw the troops from Swat once the government decides the situation has sufficiently improved and there is no further need to remain there,' The News Sunday quoted him as saying.

Speaking at another function where he distributed the first installment of a Rs.1 billion uplift package for the Swat area, the corps commander said the deployment of the army in Swat was aimed at restoring peace and not at occupying the picturesque valley.

Pakistani Army chief Gen. Ashfaq Parvez Kayani had announced the package a few days ago.

Kayani on Saturday also briefed Prime Minister Yousaf Raza Gillani on the security environment in the tribal areas, pointing out that troops were being repositioned and not withdrawn.

The briefing, held at the Prime Minister House, was also attended by Information Minister Sherry Rehman, Advisor to the Prime Minister on the Interior Rehman Malik, Inter-Services Intelligence head Lt. Gen. Nadeem Taj and senior army officers.

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