

Maulana Fazlullah may be arrested soon: Report

Pakistani forces are 'closing the dragnet' around Taliban leader Maulana Fazlullah and he could be arrested soon, a media report said Sunday.

Sources told The News that the noose around Maulana Fazlullah and his band of close associates has been tightened and 'his arrest, or elimination, at the hands of security forces could happen within the next 24 hours'.

Details about Fazlullah's whereabouts have been given by captured Taliban leader Muslim Khan. He is reported to have pinpointed a couple of most secret hiding dens of his commander.

The source also indicated that the 'arrest' of Muslim Khan may well be a negotiated surrender with security forces giving it the cover of being an arrest to retain Muslim Khan's credibility and protect his near and dear ones from Fazlullah's deadly reprisal against any perceived act of betrayal.

Military operations had begun April 26 after the Taliban reneged on a controversial peace deal with the NWFP government under which they were to lay down their arms in return for Sharia laws being imposed in the Malakand division, which includes Swat, Buner, Lower Dir and four other districts.

Instead, they moved south from their Swat headquarters and occupied Buner, which is just 100 km from Islamabad.

The operations had begun from Lower Dir, the home district of radical cleric Sufi Mohammad, who had negotiated the peace deal and who is the father-in-law of Swat Taliban commander Maulana Fazlullah. The focus later shifted to Buner and Swat.

The military says over 1,500 Taliban have been killed in the operations.

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