

Army sure of Pakistan hand, warns militants

TOUGH TALK Top officer says anyone picking up gun will be eliminated unless he surrenders

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SRINAGAR: Indian Army's top commander in Jammu and Kashmir accused Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) spy agency on Tuesday of "controlling" the Jaish-e-Mohammad terrorists behind the February 14 attack on a paramilitary convoy, and said that the outfit's leadership in the Valley had been "wiped out" in an operation.

Lieutenant general Kanwal Jeet Singh Dhillon, who was addressing a press briefing along with Inspector General of Police Swayam Prakash Pani and Inspector General (operations) of Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) Zulfiqar Hassan, also urged Kashmiri mothers to get their militant sons to surrender or see them dead. The warning, one of the toughest and most direct yet by a senior army official, comes amid a sweeping crackdown following Thursday's attack by 22-year-old Pulwama resident Adil Ahmad Dar, who blew up his car bomb next to a CRPF bus, killing 40 troopers in what is the deadliest terrorist attack ever in the region.

Within hours of the attack,



■ Lt Gen KJS Dhillon with Kashmir IGP Swayam Prakash Pani (R) and IG CRPF (Operations) Zulfiqar Hassan (L) during a press conference at the army headquarters in Srinagar. WASEEM ANDRABI/HT

Pakistan-based JeM terror group claimed responsibility, triggering calls for India to take tough measures against the neighbour. Jaish founder Masood Azhar lives in Pakistan and India has repeatedly sought his custody.

"As you are aware that convoy attack was carried out by JeM of Pakistan and it was being controlled from Pakistan with active support of ISI and the Pakistan army... I am happy to inform the country that in less than 100 hours [from Thursday's attack], we eliminated the JeM leadership, mostly Pakistanis, in the Valley which was being handled by JeM from Pakistan," said Dhillon,

referring to an 18-hour gunfight on Monday in which Jaish's operational commander Kameran and two other operatives were killed. The operation also claimed the lives of five Indian security force personnel.

The army commander said while the overall attack, which targeted a CRPF convoy of 78 vehicles going from Jammu to Kashmir, was "masterminded by Pakistan, ISI and JeM" from across the border, security agencies are investigating the role of local collaborators.

One of the three militants killed during Monday's operation in Pinglena village – which is

roughly a 30-minute drive from the bombing site – was a Kashmiri resident.

"Who was involved and what was the role of each and every other player in that attack is a matter of investigation. I would not like to share operational details," he said stressing that there was "100 percent involvement of Pakistan army in this".

The corps commander, who took over the Chinar Corps (15 Corps) on February 8, said anyone picking up a gun will be given death. "Through you I would like to request all the mothers of Kashmir to please request their sons who have joined terrorism to surrender and get back to the mainstream. Anyone who has picked up gun in Kashmir will be eliminated, unless he surrenders," he said. He admitted that Thursday's bombing was unprecedented in its scale and method. "A car bombing of this type of intensity had not happened earlier. Similar incidents have happened in other countries like Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan..." he said.

Kashmir Police IG Pani said, "Last year, 58 cadres of JeM were killed out of 252 while 12 have been killed this year out of 31."