

EU shocker for separatists in Kashmir

Srinagar, November 25: A European Union delegation that is visiting Srinagar has given a jolt to separatists.

It termed Kashmir as an "integral part of India". Separatists have always considered EU's views on Kashmir "part of the efforts taken at the international level" for peaceful resolution of the Kashmir issue.

"We consider Kashmir an integral part of India," Sweden's ambassador Lars-Olof Lindgran, leading the EU delegation, told reporters after meeting Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front chairman Yasin Malik.

Lindgran's comments contrast sharply with what the European Parliament had said on July 24, 2004.

Its Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy has issued a report and called Kashmir as "the most beautiful prison in the world." It had also recommended the appointment of a standing rapporteur.

Lars said the EU was for a peaceful resolution of the Kashmir dispute. He said Kashmir had to be resolved among the parties in the dispute.

The delegation, Lars said, was in Kashmir to understand the situation and have a feel of it. "We also want to know whether the peace process has moved ahead or not," he added.

The head of the delegation said the "human Rights situation in Kashmir wasn't good but there is an improvement." The delegation is understood to be on a special mission in Kashmir. It is going to submit its report to EU. The delegation is expected to meet chief minister Omar Abdullah on Wednesday to discuss the political situation in the state.

Besides Malik, the delegation held meetings with GOC 15 Corps, and Hurriyat Conference chairman Mirwaiz Umar Farooq.

Unruffled by the comments of the EU delegation, Malik said he had conveyed to it the aspirations of the Kashmiri people.

"I told them that it is the responsibility of the world community to resolve the Kashmir dispute," Malik said.

"If the world community becomes indifferent, it could force Kashmiris back to violence," Malik said.

The EU has been sending its delegation to Kashmir for the past several years and has always given separatists something to cheer about.

---Agencies