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Nuclear Issues

1. Nuclear Risk Reduction

Tanvir Ahmad Khan writes in The Dawn that while India and Pakistan's development of nuclear weapons was to force them to dialogue to promote effective management of their nuclear deterrents, their individual talks with the US and others can't have addressed the need for a comprehensive strategic restraint regime. Khan states that Pakistan has made progress towards creating stable nuclear decision-making bodies. Khan also states that while India sees it nuclear deterrent as relating to countries besides Pakistan, Pakistan sees its nuclear force as being India-specific.

2. India Proposed Disarmament

Indian Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, speaking at an inauguration of the 2600 birth anniversary of Lord Mahavira, stated that India was prepared to destroy its nuclear weapons if all other nuclear weapons states decide to destroy theirs. He said, "India has always stood for global nuclear disarmament, but we have taken certain steps in self-defense. We do not want nuclear weapons to proliferate."

3. Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty

Swedish Foreign Minister Anna Lindh urged India to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, and said the European Union wanted both India and Pakistan to resume talks over Kashmir. Lindh made these comments at a joint press conference with Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh in Sweden.

Asghar Khan, a retired Pakistani Air Marshal, urged Pakistan to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and said that the nuclear program was a waste of money that should be spent on the peoples' welfare. He said that the "nuclear bomb is not a weapon of war."

India

1. Kashmir Dialogue Offer

V. Sudarshan writes in Outlook India that Indian Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee is seeking to reinvigorate talks over Kashmir in an attempt to stave off a personal political crisis. Sudarshan states that K.C. Pant will be the government's interlocutor, and that India's statements that talks will be without preconditions is an attempt to get the All Parties Hurriyat Conference to drop the demand for passports to Pakistan to precede talks.

The Indian government has rolled out an initiative to hold talks with Kashmiri groups, including certain militant groups and the All Parties Hurriyat Conference. Home Minister L.K. Advani stated his hope that talks would begin by May as the ceasefire is due to again expire then. Advani stated that talks would be with "groups in India," but ruled out talks with the Hizbul Mujahideen.

2. Comments on Kashmir Dialogue Offer

US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher stated that the US welcomed India's offer of talks and urged all groups to enter into talks to reduce violence.

An editorial in the Times of India argues that despite the appointment of K.C. Pant to the Kashmir issue, if the people should decide that the recent initiative is merely an attempt to distract attention from the defense scandal, it will put the government into further problems.

Commerce and Industry Minister Omar Abdullah called for an extension of the unilateral ceasefire in Kashmir, arguing that it has created a favorable international opinion of India's Kashmir policy.

3. India-Pakistan Relations

The Hindu and the Deccan Herald cited government sources which stated that the Indian government, seeking to avoid loosing the initiative on Kashmir, may not be adverse to de-linking Kashmir from other issues affecting India-Pakistan relations.

The Indian External Affairs Ministry defended India's construction of fences along the Working Boundary. A statement released by the ministry justified the fences as defensive structures, built to defend the country from Pakistan-trained militants.

4. India-PRC Relations

Lieutenant General H.R.S. Kalkat, commander of India's Eastern Command Army, stated that India had informed the PRC that India was interested in continuing the process of recognizing the Line of Actual Control. Kalkat has just returned from a trip to the PRC where the border issue was discussed.

Lieutenant General H.R.S. Kalkat also announced the resumption of military-to-military exchanges between the armed forces of India and the PRC. Bilateral military ties have been frozen since the 1998 Pokhran II tests.

5. Regional Issues

R. Prasannan writes in The Week that, similar to the PRC's claim that the US EP-3 spy plane was intruding into PRC territory, US and British naval vessels have been intruding into India's exclusive economic zone without permission to conduct oceanographic surveys. Prasannan cites naval officers who state that such surveys may be for submarine operations, but that India's military is also concerned about the potential mapping of India's East coast, where India tests its missiles.

Shireen M. Mazari, Director General of Islamabad's Institute of Strategic Studies, argues that US President Bush is reasserting US military power and revitalizing historical animosities in order to rationalize the unhindered projection of US power. Mazari states that the US missile defense program clearly targets the PRC, as does the military containment of the PRC using defense relationships with countries along the South China Sea. Mazari also argues that there needs to be a greater effort towards making the nuclear weapons in South Asia safe as the reality is that they will remain in India and Pakistan's arsenals for quite some time.

Pakistan

1. Military Government

Former Prime Minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto writes in the Times of India that Pakistan's

military regime is planning constitutional reforms that will technically restore democracy to the country while actually keeping control within the grasp of the military.

Pakistan's The News reported that Pakistan's Supreme Court had set aside the convictions of Former Prime Minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto and her husband Asif Ali Zardari, and had ordered a new trial. An essay in The Hindu speculates that the decision raises the possibility that civilian rule in Pakistan has an opportunity if the judiciary refuses to be cowed by the military government.

2. Military Hardware

Russia has backed out of a deal to provide engines for a collaborative effort by Pakistan and the PRC to build the Super-7 fighter plane. Russia has backed out of previous deals to supply fighters to Pakistan under pressure from India. The Super-7 is described as a match for the Russian SU-30 being acquired by India.

3. Pakistan-India Relations

Pakistan chief spokesman Major General Rashid Quereshi stated that Pakistan would push India on the issue of its fencing the working boundary, arguing that Pakistan believes India is acting contrary to the UN Security Council resolutions.

Pakistan Chief Executive Pervez Musharraf stated that Pakistan and India should begin talks on all issues, without preconditions. Musharraf stated that Kashmir is the primary bilateral issue, one requiring the participation of Pakistan, India and Kashmiri groups in any talks.

Pakistan chief spokesman Major General Rashid Quereshi stated that India's attempt to push the All Parties Hurriyat Conference to talks, despite the APHC's statement that it would not speak with India until it had been able to complete a trip to Pakistan to conduct talks there, was an attempt to divide Pakistan from the APHC.

Kashmir

1. Overview

K.K. Katyal argues in The Hindu that the Indian government's decision to name K.C. Pant as interlocutor between the government and the Kashmiri groups does not indicate a concise enough plan to guide Pant. Katyal also reviews a number of recurring issues in the Kashmir, including raising the divergent obligations of coping with demands for regional autonomy and for coping with militancy. Katyal argues that the Indian government's promise to speak with all Kashmiris is a rejection of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference's sought role as sole legitimate representative of the Kashmiris.

Afzaal Mahmood argues in an editorial in The Dawn that India's recent initiative in Kashmir, as led by Home Minister L.K. Advani, who Mahmood describes as a hardliner, is an attempt to divide the militancy movement, keep Pakistan out of the process, and deflect negative international opinion. Mahmood concludes by arguing that one of the few steps that could lead to dramatic progress in India-Pakistan relations would be a meeting between Indian Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee and Pakistan Chief Executive Pervez Musharraf.

2. Ceasefire Issues

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah called for an extension of India's unilateral ceasefire in Kashmir.

3. Militant Groups and India's Dialogue Offer

The All Parties Hurriyat Conference spokesman in New Delhi, Abdul Majid Bandey, stated that the Indian government's offer of talks is a major development. The executive council of the APHC met and decided to reject India's offer of talks, stating no purpose could be fulfilled unless India permitted an APHC delegation to visit Pakistan. However, APHC chairman Abdul Gani Bhat indicated that the APHC was not against the spirit of engaging in dialogue.

The Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Toiba militant group also rejected India's offer of talks. Jammu and Kashmir People's League chairman Mohammad Farooq Rehmani also rejected India's call for talks and called on India to include Pakistan in any talks.

The Hindu is reporting that while All Parties Hurriyat Conference chairman Abdul Gani Bhat rejected India's offer of talks, Abdul Gani Lone downplayed Bhat's statement, saying it was Bhat's "personal opinion."

4. Militant Groups

All Parties Hurriyat Conference leader Abdul Gani Lone was placed under house arrest in Jammu. A police official stated that this was for Lone's safety following threats by Shiv Sena and other activists.

Sri Lanka

1. Peace Talks

Norwegian Ambassador to Sri Lanka Jon Westborg conceded a key LTTE demand and announced an easing of Sri Lanka's economic embargo against the LTTE. Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar stated that Sri Lanka was nearly ready to announce the date and venue for peace talks with the LTTE before the end of April. The talks and Sri Lanka's easing of economic sanctions were seen as part of an agreement, where the LTTE's part was desisting from "acts of sabotage."

In a statement, the LTTE rules out the possibility of talks with the government until Sri Lanka lifted a ban on the LTTE and reciprocated a truce. The statement said the lifting of economic sanctions was insufficient.

2. Commentary on Peace Talks

Nirupama Subramanian writes in The Hindu that this is the latest pre-condition to talks by the LTTE. The Times of India reported that the LTTE has used similar demands for supplies to reinforce militarily.

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