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Nuclear Issues

1. India Satellite Launch

India conducted a successful test launch of its satellite rocket Geo-synchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV-D1) and put an experimental satellite payload of 3,000 pounds into orbit. India joins the US, Russia, Japan, the PRC and the European Space Agency as the only countries that can lift heavy satellites into space. The US had sought to prevent India from achieving heavy satellite launch capability on the grounds it would violate the Missile Technology Control Regime. As a result Russia provided seven engines for the rocket's third stage but not the technology. Defense experts say India's space program could also serve as a platform to test a wide range of military technologies, including missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads. The Indian Space Research Organization reported that the satellite was functioning normally.

Manoj Joshi writes in the Times of India that the satellite launch allows India to enter the international launch vehicle market, but also allows India to launch its own satellites, including those for military use. Joshi argues, "India has been a laggard in using outer space for military uses."

2. Russia-India Trade

Russia's state-owned Space Scientific Production Center stated that it would provide India with five 12KRB blocks for use in their GLSV carrier rockets.

Alexander Rumyantsev, Russia's new Atomic Energy Minister, stated that Russia intends to continue nuclear cooperation with India and is looking to clear international hurdles to supplying India with additional nuclear reactors.

3. Pakistan Nuclear Commission

Sources in Pakistan's Finance Ministry reported that it intends to cut the budget of the Pakistan Atomic Energy Commission by 25 percent, 10 percent of which is from the classified budget that funds the nuclear and missile research programs. Through the media notes that this move comes shortly after the retirement of the nuclear program's two top scientists and shortly before talks with the US are due to begin on its sanctions, the officially offered reason relates to Pakistan's financial constraints.

4. US Statements on Nuclear South Asia

K.K. Katyal writes in The Hindu that a senior official in the administration of US President George Bush recently remarked that, with the US having recently faced diplomatic hurdles with the PRC, Koreas, and Japan, the "only thing we've missed is a nuclear confrontation between India and Pakistan." Katyal argues that US policy should instead focus on recent positive statements by leaders in India and Pakistan.

India

1. India-Pakistan Relations

The Indian government reported that Pakistan has destroyed their end of a 135-yard tunnel being dug by Pakistan across the border with India. Indian Border Security Forces discovered the tunnel on March 1 and lodged a protest with Pakistan.

Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh stated that the Indian government continues to reject a role for Pakistan in its dialogue with Kashmiri groups, but he did not rule out direct meetings with Pakistan.

India made a mistake in taking the Kashmir issue to the UN in 1948 after defeating Pakistan in a war, says Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh. Singh said, "Instead, we should have finished the task."

2. India-Bangladesh Border Skirmish

Sixteen Indian troops and two Bangladeshi soldier were killed near their shared border along India's border district of Kurigram. Bangladesh Rifles (BDR) border guard head Major General Fazlul Rahman said about 300 Indian Border Security Forces "attacked suddenly and also used mortars... but our troops retaliated.

The Deccan Herald reported that this followed a weekend incident in which 20 Indian troops were taken hostage when Bangladesh seized a frontier outpost in the village of Pyrdiwah from India. Bangladesh also claims the village as within its territory, and had moved hundreds of hundreds of civilians into the village. 3,000 Indian civilians reportedly fled the region.

Indian Foreign Ministry spokesman Raminder Jassal reported that both India and Bangladesh expressed regret over the incident and promised to exercise restraint in the future.

Fresh clashes erupted along the India-Bangladesh border, just hours after both side voiced regret for the recent killings, though the Times of India reported that by midnight of April 20th firing had again fallen silent. The article also revised upwards the number of Indian civilians who fled the region to 6,000, and stated that Indian government officials were attempting to convince villagers to return to their homes.

A senior Border Security Force officer reported that India had accepted the return of the bodies of Indian soldiers being returned by the Bangladesh Rifles (BDR). He said the bodies were "highly mutilated and beyond recognition."

3. Commentary on Border Skirmish

Nirmalya Banerjee writes in the Times of India that incomplete fencings and indifferent vigilance along the borders contribute to border disputes such as these.

An essay in The Hindu stated that the incident should serve as a reminder against complacency in bilateral relations among neighbors. The essay argues that the killings contradict assertions that India's relations are, with the exception of Pakistan, moving positively. The essay concludes by stating that the leadership of both countries must investigate the incident and discuss issues presented by porous and uncertain borders.

Pakistan

1. Military Government

As reported previously, Pakistan's Supreme Court has set aside the conviction of Former Prime Minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto and ordered a new trial. A recent report in the Times of India states that the Supreme Court accused Justice Malik Mohammad Qayyum of having succumbed to a pro-Sharif bias. The Court stated that the judge had accepted personal favors from the Sharif government.

2. World Bank

Officials from a World Bank team were informed by Pakistan's petroleum industry that the Sui Northern Gas Pipelines and the Sui Southern Gas Company were rejecting World Bank financing and advisory assistance for an infrastructure project, and would instead depend upon their own resources.

3. Pakistan-PRC Relations

Pakistan Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar stated that Pakistan intended to bolster efforts to increase trade with the PRC, which totaled US$1.2 billion in bilateral trade last year. To commemorate the 50th anniversary of bilateral diplomatic relations between their countries, PRC Premier Zhu Rongji will visit Pakistan beginning on May 11 and Pakistan will reciprocate later this year with a visit by its president.

Pakistani daily Jang cited reliable sources as stating that Pakistan and the PRC would postpone cooperation in the design and manufacture of their Super-7 multi-purpose fighter plane because Russia was withdrawing its offer to supply RD-93 engines used in the MiG-29.

4. Pakistan-US Relations

Chidanand Rajghatta writes in the Times of India that the appointment in the US of Christina Roca as Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia will result in apprehension in Pakistan. Roca was involved in the US proxy war against the USSR in Afghanistan as a CIA Directorate of Operations staff officer and was among those urging that Pakistan be placed upon the US watch-list of state-sponsors of terrorism in January 1993.

Kashmir

1. India-Kashmiri Dialogue

The Hindu reports that Kashmiris have voiced little enthusiasm for the appointment of K.C. Pant as the Indian government's interlocutor for talks with Kashmiris, and that there is generally a perception that he was appointed only because ceasefire's utility appeared to have reached a dead-end. The article states that militant and separatist groups have rejected the peace process and that the All-Parties Hurriyat Conference has yet to make a firm response. The article states that there is disagreement over whether peace is a precondition or a result of the resolution of the Kashmir issue.

2. All-Parties Hurriyat Conference

The seven-member executive council of the All-Parties Hurriyat Conference, which met to discuss a response to the offer of talks by Indian interlocutor K.C. Pant, decided to further discuss the offer at

a working committee meeting and then at a general council meeting next Monday. This decision was attributed to the absence of a consensus on the offer. An APHC spokesman said the council was generally favorable to meaningful talks, though other sources said they disagreed over whether to accept the offer. The council did decide to reinstate the pro-Pakistan representative of the Jamaat--Islami, Syed Ali Shah Geelani, to the executive council. APHC spokesman Abdul Bandey stated that the APHC is apprehensive about the Indian government's offer because previous governments have fallen back on their promises.

All-Parties Hurriyat Conference leader Abdul Gani Lone criticized the Indian government for complicating talks, arguing that it is doing so to attenuate the peace process. He said, "The Center should have called only the aggrieved parties instead of inviting all groups, even those who do not have any reservations over accession of Kashmir to India."

Syed Mir Qasim, a former Chief Minister of Kashmir, stated that the latest Indian government peace initiatives could not succeed without Pakistan's involvement or without a prominent role for the All-Parties Hurriyat Conference. Qasim said their participation was important to creating credibility for the process. He also said that permitting the APHC to visit Pakistan would not create any problems.

3. APHC Leader in Pakistan

During what was described as a private trip to Pakistan, pro-Pakistan All-Parties Hurriyat Conference executive council member Shaikh Abdul Aziz met with Pakistan Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar. Aziz reportedly told Sattar that he welcomed Pakistani initiatives to reduce tensions and start a settlement of the Kashmir issue. Aziz also reportedly met with Pakistan Chief Executive Pervez Musharraf. Speaking at his brother's wedding reception, Aziz stated that India must withdraw occupation forces from Kashmir and enter into talks with Pakistan before there can be a resolution to the Kashmir issue.

4. Recent Violence

The Times of India reported that violence under the ceasefire this year in Jammu and Kashmir has been greater than the previous year. It reports that 384 civilians and 200 security personnel have been killed so far this year, compared with 358 civilians and 171 security personnel by this time the previous year.

Sri Lanka

1. Military Operations

The Sri Lankan Navy reported that it destroyed four boats off Chalai and five supply boats off Mullaithivu belonging to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Six LTTE fighters were killed and others captured. Diplomatic sources say that this incident and earlier ones have hardened both sides and threatens to delay the Norwegian-sponsored peace initiative.

2. LTTE Unilateral Ceasefire

Top LTTE mediator Anton Balasingham stated that the LTTE may extend its current unilateral ceasefire by a month. Balasingham also said that he had asked Norway to broaden its diplomatic efforts towards talks to end the civil war rather than limiting itself to initiating bilateral talks between the LTTE and the Sri Lankan government. The LTTE later said it would not extend the

ceasefire further, stating that it had become a futile effort without its reciprocation by Sri Lanka.

3. Peace Process

Anton Balasingham also indicated that the LTTE may not participate in talks unless the government accepts certain preconditions: reciprocating the unilateral ceasefire, removing certain trade restrictions, de-proscribing the LTTE, and describing the pre-talks agreement as a Memorandum of Understanding rather than an "Agreement on Humanitarian Measures."

Ranil Wickremesinghe, leader of Sri Lanka's opposition United National Party, stated while in Norway that his party would not support the Norwegian-sponsored peace process unless there were accompanying domestic political reforms.

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