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Nuclear Issues

1. Related News and Analysis

Commentators in Pakistani and Indian newspapers have sharply criticized the leaked Nuclear Posture Review as indicating "a new US belligerency" and undermining the Non -Proliferation Treaty. Iran and Pakistan have also stated that the US "risked triggering a new arms race if it went ahead with reported plans to develop new types of nuclear weapons."

Afghanistan

1. Current Situation

Unconfirmed reports in the daily Frontier Post, Pakistan, indicate that al-Qaeda and Taliban fighter might be regrouping in Khost, a town in southeast Afghanistan. According to an Afghan Radio report, US-led coalition forces killed 50 al-Qaeda fighters in an assault in eastern Afghanistan. A report, quoting various humanitarian aid groups, suggests that militias of other ethnic groups are persecuting Paktuns in northern Afghanistan.

2. Reconstruction

The framework for a traditional Loya Jirga that will choose a transitional leader and government for Afghanistan has been agreed upon. Former king Mohammad Zahir Shah is scheduled to return to Afghanistan on April 16 to convene the Jirga in June. Meanwhile, 1,700 British troops are expected to be ready for deployment by mid-April. The presence of large number of land mines is reportedly hindering reconstruction work in the country.
"Framework for Loya Jirga agreed"
"Loya Jirga to be held in June"

3. Humanitarian Crisis

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), over 100,000 Afghan refugees have returned from Pakistan to Afghanistan. It is now believed that about 2000 people were killed in recent earthquakes in northern Afghanistan. Both international peacekeepers and humanitarian agencies have been involved in relief work.
"2,000 killed in Afghan earthquake: World help sought"

India-Pakistan Tensions

1. News

In a wide-ranging interview with the daily Hindu, India, President Musharraf stated that Pakistan

army is prepared to stay mobilized for five years. According to India's Defense Minister George Fernandes the possibility of war between the two countries cannot be ruled out. Meanwhile, three villagers were reportedly killed in cross-border shelling.
"Let us look to the future, says Musharraf"
"Three killed in Indian shelling"

2. Analysis

Writing for the daily Dawn, Maqbool Ahmad Bhatty argues that "India's persistence in coercive diplomacy" is losing support among "thinking Indians." Farrukh Saleem's essay in the daily News, Pakistan, argues that Pakistan should demobilize its forces and focus on economic development. Pran Chopra's article in the daily Hindustan Times would urges Indian government to "readily respond to any opportunity for a safe scaling down of the mobilization."
"India's coercive diplomacy"
"The costs of standing up"

Pakistan

1. Pakistan: Domestic Situation

Pakistani law enforcement agencies, along with US personnel, conducted raids in various cities in an attempt to capture alleged al-Qaeda members. According to a report in the daily News, the raids have now been temporarily halted. 16 of the over fifty people arrested during the raid were later released. Pakistan has reportedly handed some of the people arrested over to the FBI for interrogation. Among those arrested is Abu-Zubayda, the highest-ranking al-Qaeda member arrested to date.
"16 Al Qaeda suspects released"
"FBI questioning Al Qaeda men"

The decision to hand over al-Qaeda suspects to the US was criticized by the daily Frontier Post. It remains unclear if Pakistan will allow the US troops searching for al-Qaeda members to operate within Pakistan's territory. According to a report by Jane's Information Group, Israel's foreign intelligence service has been directed to kill those responsible for US journalist Daniel Pearl's murder. Writing in Asia Times, Ashan Ahrari argues that the power of Pakistan's intelligence agency (ISI) has been exaggerated by the Pakistani military.
"Al Qaeda: question of hot pursuit still unanswered"
"Pakistan's army lays a political smokescreen"

President Perez Musharraf has stated that there is "absolutely" no pressure on him to relinquish charge as the chief of army staff after the elections of October 2002. The Pakistani Federal Cabinet is expected to approve the holding of referendum to allow President Musharraf to stay in power for another five years. Many religious parties have announced their opposition to the planned referendum. Columnist Imtiaz Alam argues that President Musharraf is only adopting the "label of democracy." Meanwhile, there are rumors that the government is considering a proposal to hold October general elections on non-party basis.
"Cabinet to approve referendum plan"

India

1. India: Domestic Situation

Indian newspapers have reported sporadic communal violence. Indian opposition parties have been calling for the resignation of Gujarat's Chief Minister Narendra Modi. An article in the daily Hindu argues that the opposition parties should demand more than just the resignation of the Minister.
"Modi must go: Opposition"
"Who are the guilty?"

2. China-India Relations

The Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh recently visited China. Articles in the daily Hindu and the Asia Times examine the state of China-India relations.
"From romance to realism"
"India, China draw lines in the sand"

Kashmir

1. Internal Situation

Indian and Pakistani newspapers reported continued political violence and unrest in Jammu and Kashmir.
"16 killed in Kashmir"
"Temple attack: toll up to 8"

The Jammu and Kashmir police arrested, and later released, Javed Ahmad Mir, the acting chairman of the Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF). There were reports of protests against the earlier arrest of JKLF chairman Yasin Malik. The senior All-Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC) leader Abdul Gani Lone was reportedly assaulted by the Kashmir president of the Shiv Sena, Kalki Jimahara. The APHC has called upon Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to take a "new initiative" in Kashmir. Meanwhile, Lashkar-e-Toiba founder Hafeez Mohammad Saeed, recently released by a Pakistan court, has reportedly urged his men in the Kashmir Valley to launch new attacks.
"Lone assaulted by J&K Shiv Sena chief"

Regional News

1. Sri Lanka

The Sri Lankan government and the LTTE have decided to start negotiations within the next six-weeks without any preconditions.

2. Nepal

The conflict between Maoist guerrillas and the government's security forces has continued in Nepal.

3. Bangladesh

Two reports in the Far Eastern Economic Review examine rising fundamentalism and religious

intolerance in Bangladesh.

4. Region

Iraq has pledged - in writing - never to invade Kuwait again.

In an article for the daily News, Shireeen Mazari writes that the "chasm" between the US and the Muslim world is "widening." John Cherian essay in Frontline magazine argues that the US military campaign in Afghanistan has "clearly fallen short" of its goals.

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