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Nuclear Issues

1. Related News and Analysis

In an interview with the daily Hindu, Russian President Vladimir Putin expressed his concern that Pakistan's nuclear weapons can fall into the hands of terrorists. Pakistan rejected Putin's concerns. A daily News editorial remarks that "such charges can best be applied to Russia as there have been 200 incidents of smuggling nuclear material in suitcases."
"Interview with Putin"

India's Naval Chief Admiral Madhvendra Singh has stated that India "must have a nuclear triad with the strongest arm at sea, preferably underwater." The daily Indian Express reports that Russia has offered India an arms package that includes the sale of the aircraft carrier, Admiral Gorshkov, along with a three-year lease of a Akula II class nuclear submarine.
"Navy chief for sub shot to nuke triad"
"Icing on Gorshkov cake for India: a nuclear submarine"

Afghanistan

1. Current News

The daily News reports that the planned formation of a 70,000-strong Afghan army, recently announced by President Karzai, will take several years and will not be possible without substantial foreign aid. According to President Karzai, Iran, Pakistan, China, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan have agreed to meet with Afghan leaders in Kabul on December 22 to sign an accord aimed at fostering regional cooperation and security. Pakistan and Afghanistan have reportedly finalized an agreement to repatriate at least 1.2 million Afghan refugees over the next three years from camps along their common border.
According to the Turkish commander of the multinational force, Major General Hilmi Akin Zorlu, "after almost each incident [of missile attacks] we've been receiving some proposals to buy some [Stinger] rockets or missiles.'' The Agency Coordination Body for Afghan Relief believes that US military's involvement in reconstruction work could undermine existing aid efforts.

According to Zalmay Khalilzad, special US envoy for Afghanistan, Mulla Omar's son-in-law has been captured in Afghanistan. Veteran reporter Rahimullah Yusufzai finds Khalilzad's claim strange since Mullah Omar "didn't have a daughter of marriageable age."

India-Pakistan Tensions

1. SAARC

Pakistan has postponed the 12th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) summit, blaming India for disrupting the process. Editorials in the daily News (Pakistan) and the Hindu (India) hold India primarily responsible for the disruption of the summit. Nadeem Malik (News) believes that the postponement of the summit "would only further aggravate economic conditions in the region." Raja Mohan (Hindu) discusses the possibility of more active US role in SAARC.
"A summit postponed"

"Getting America into SAARC"

2. Other News

Indian army chief General Padmanabhan has stated that "the infiltration of extremists across the border has come down considerably..." Indian security forces have reportedly begun procuring and deploying special surveillance equipment along the Line of Control to check infiltration. Brajesh Mishra, Vajpayee's principal secretary and India's national security adviser, believes that the "US and other governments" have failed to force Pakistan to "end infiltration of terrorists into Jammu and Kashmir..." The daily Hindustan Times believes that "if India-Pakistan relations have reached some kind of a stalemate, some of the responsibility has to be shared by the US." A Pakistan foreign office spokesman, commenting on a recently signed declaration between the Russian President and the Indian Prime Minister, has stated "that the Russian leadership has been taken in by the Indian propaganda"
"US failed to check Pakistan"
"Declaration shocks Pakistan"

3. Analysis

December 13 marked the one-year anniversary of the attack on the Indian Parliament that triggered the military standoff between India and Pakistan. Brahma Chellaney (Hindustan Times) suggests that December 13th "defined not India's resolve but its indefiniteness." K Shankar Bajpai, a former senior Indian diplomat, writes that India's "most effective answer to Pakistan's animosity is to make [itself] so strong economically and militarily that [Pakistan's] tactics are stultified by our sheer strength." Anjali Mody's three part report in the daily Hindu examines weaknesses in the prosecution's case against men charged with involvement in the attack on the Parliament.
"A year after December 13"
"Few straight answers yet"
"Loose links in prosecution's chain"
"Prosecution evidence fails on many counts"

M.V. Ramana's essay (Daily Times) comments on remarks made by India's Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani's stating "let us fight it out face to face. We have fought thrice; let there be a fourth war" and writes that "the depth to which political rhetoric has sunk is truly depressing." Amit Baruh (Hindu) also laments Advani's remarks and feels that "India's Pakistan policy will have to bear the brunt of the BJP's desperation to win the coming elections in Gujarat."
"War rhetoric bodes ill for peace"

Pakistan

1. Domestic News

Pakistan's newly elected Prime Minister, Zafar Jamali, has stated that his government believes in "continuity of policies." There has been internal discord within the Prime Minister Jamali's Pakistan Muslim League (Q). The newly-elected members of the Sindh Assembly have called for the rejection of the constitutional amendments introduced over the past six months by President Musharraf. In an interview with the Daily Times, Vice-President of Jamaate Islami, Liaquat Baloch, stated that Muttahida Majilis-e-Amal is "not in a hurry to oust this government, or move a no-confidence motion against it or form a joint opposition." Masooda Bano (News) writes that "the current military run democratic set up [is] perpetuating all that is ugly about a political culture."

"PML-Q divided over Azhar's fate"
"Uproar as Sindh MPAs take oath"

Three slaughtered bodies were recovered from the debris of the office of the honorary consul-general of Macedonia in Karachi that collapsed after a bomb blast. Azfar-ul-Ashafque (News) reports that security agencies are trying to establish links between the bomb blast and the killing of six Pakistanis in the Macedonian capital Skopje in March 2002. The daily News reports that US FBI is also involved in the investigations. A bomb blast has also damaged a major natural gas pipeline in Pakistan. A number of tribesmen, suspected of links with al-Qaeda, have reportedly been arrested from Pakistan's north western tribal areas. The daily News reports thaat most Pakistani prisoners being held at Guantanamo Bay have no links to al-Qaeda. Another report in the same newspaper indicates that the six Pakistanis arrested in connection with the bomb attack in the Kenyan city of Mombassa are actually innocent fishermen.

Rear Admiral Muhammad Haroon has been appointed the Chief of Staff of Pakistan Navy.

Zubeida Mustafa examines the newly released UNFPA's State of the World Population 2002 report and writes that the report "should give much food for thought to policy makers in Pakistan."
"As our population grows"

2. US - Pakistan Relations

According to Pakistan's Information Minister Shaikh Rashid Ahmed, there are only "12 FBI/CIA and other personnel, and a few hundred foreign soldiers are based in Jaccobabad." The Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) has again demanded an immediate halt to American commandos and FBI operations in tribal areas. Amir Jamaat-e-Islami Qazi Hussain Ahmed has also stated that the MMA would disrupt President Musharraf's government and assist Baghdad if Iraq is attacked by the US.

Essays by Moeed Pirzada (News), M.B. Naqvi (News) raise concerns about emerging tensions in US-Pakistan relationship

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India

1. India: Domestic Situation

An unexpectedly high 63 per cent of the electorate voted in a mostly uneventful election to the Gujarat assembly. The result of the elections have not yet been announced, though it is widely believed that the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will win. The daily Indian Express' report from a village notes that the fear of violence by Hindu extremists kept almost all Muslim voters away from the polling station. Muzamil Jaleel reports that some Muslims feel that the Congress is unwilling to challenge the extremist anti-Muslim politics of the BJP in Gujarat.
"A village ensures that just one Muslim voted"
"Waiting Congress gets reality check from Jafri's sister"

The Gujarat elections are seen by many commentators as important in defining the future course of the Indian polity. Bharat Bhushan (Daily Times) argues that "the sangh parivar (the RSS family of organizations) wants to show [by winning the Gujarat elections] that Hindutva can be a major election plank." Rajni Kothari (Hindustan Times) writes that "the communal virus has spread and overtaken Gujarat society as a whole in which the middle-class has played a catalytic role." Mahmood Farooqui (Hindustan Times) states that the "the BJP has already won the war of Gujarat"

since the Congress is "mortally afraid of alienating the 'moderate' Hindus."

Writing on the occasion of the ten anniversary of the attack on Babri masjid, The daily Hindustan Times writes that the "despicable attack on the mosque ... was a negation of every facet of modern life which India had been painstakingly building since 1947 - democracy, rule of law and a multicultural polity."

A recent report examined by the Frontline magazine details the means adopted by the US-based India Development and Relief Fund to collect funds from US corporations and channel them to Hindu fundamentalist organizations. An investigative report by the British TV network Channel 4 News alleges that a high-profile Indian charity group SEWA International has been raising funds for extreme Hindu groups involved in Gujarat massacre in the name of riot victims.

2. Foreign Relations

Raja Mohan (Hindu) argues that "New Delhi's interest lies in expanding bilateral relations with Washington, Moscow and Beijing rather than building alliance with one or two against the other." The daily Hindu writes that "the future of the India-Russia defence relationship should be assessed not by new agreements reached but by the progress made on those that are pending." Fasih Bokhari (Daily Times) examines the debate on whether or not India should accept Russia's offer to "gift" the aircraft carrier Admiral Gorshkov to India and argues that India should move away from its "Pakistan-centric" defense policy and develop a global strategy.
"Strategic triangle in focus during Putin's visit"
"India-Russia defence ties"

Kashmir

1. News and Analysis

The Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) government has constituted a screening committee for the release of militants. J&K State Human Rights Commission chairman Justice A.Q. Parray has stated that his organization is "toothless and not in a position to implement anything." The daily Indian Express reports on efforts to revive tourism in Kashmir.

Balraj Puri (Hindu) argues that "there is universal realisation in Kashmir, including in the separatist camp, that the role of the gun is over. If this is properly articulated, militancy will lose ground." Sajjad Lone, chairman of the Peoples Conference, has stated that it his opinion that "plebiscite and self-determination have been rendered irrelevant and ... that the violence can never achieve the political goals." Shujaat Bukhari (Hindu) suggests that "there is a new atmosphere in Kashmir, even though militant violence and alienation among the people remain." Abbas Rashid (Daily Times) argues that Pakistan should take " a more accommodating approach towards the new dispensation in Kashmir."
"Terror in J&K"
"Needed: a free hand for Mufti Govt."

Regional News

1. Bangladesh

At least 17 people were killed in an almost simultaneous bomb attacks on four cinemas. Bangladesh's Home Minister Altaf Hossain Chowdhury has ruled out any al-Qaeda links with blasts. The Daily Star (Bangladesh) reports that Bengladeshi authorities do not have any leads on "the motives and the masterminds behind several powerful bomb explosions since 1999 that have claimed nearly 100 lives."

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