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Nuclear Issues

1. News and Analysis

Pakistan's Communications Minister Javed Ashraf told a Kuwaiti newspaper that, if attacked by India, Pakistan cannot guarantee 'no first use' of nuclear weapons. In his column for the daily News, Pakistan, M.B.Naqvi argues that Pakistan's nuclear weapons have not helped the country achieve its security or foreign policy goals and recommends unilateral denuclearisation by Pakistan. According to a report in Asia Times, the US would like India and Pakistan to have an agreement on "moratorium, non-deployment and security of nuclear devices and missiles."

Post September 11th Developments

1. Afghanistan: Current Situation

The expected deployment in Afghanistan of 4,500 soldiers from 17 countries is scheduled to be completed by mid-February. Afghan interim leader Hamid Karzai, however, has asked for more international peacekeeping troops.

Afghan and US troops stormed a hospital in Kandahar to end a six-week siege Al Qaeda men. All six Al-Qaeda men were killed in the attack. Afghan villagers in Uruzgan province have claimed that the US Special Forces soldiers mistakenly killed 15 civilians during a raid.

Afghan warlords Badshah Khan Zadran and Saif Ullah have reportedly been battling for the control of Paktia province. Reports indicate that about sixty people have been killed in the battle so far. Meanwhile, Afghan warlord Ismail Khan, in control of much of the western Afghanistan, has rejected charges made by the US special envoy for Afghanistan Zalmay Khalilzad that Iran is interfering in Afghanistan's domestic affairs. United Nations relief workers have again warned that lawlessness and crime in Afghanistan is seriously hampering their aid work.

2. Afghanistan: Reconstruction

According to a World Health Organization (WHO) report, about \$2.2 billion is needed to develop a functioning health system in Afghanistan. The Agha Khan, spiritual leader of the Shia Ismaili Muslim community, has announced a commitment of \$75 million to help rebuild Afghanistan. A Reuters report published in the daily News, Pakistan, indicates that without urgent delivery of the promised funds to Afghanistan, the country's interim government might not be able to function much longer.

According to a report in the daily News, Pakistan, India has promised to help Afghanistan set up an army. Afghanistan's deputy defense minister Rashid Dostam, who is visiting India, has however denied that he is seeking Indian military hardware.

3. Afghanistan: Humanitarian Crisis

The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has reported that over 3,500 ethnic Pashtuns fleeing persecution by various Northern Alliance groups have crossed into Pakistan. The interim Afghan authority has accepted the UNHCR proposed plan to assist the return of hundreds of

thousands of refugees this year. The Pakistan government has formed a committee to develop a plan to shift Afghan refugees living in Pakistani cities to refugee camps.

Hundreds of Afghans seeking asylum in Australia have joined in a 12-day-old hunger strike. The asylum seekers are upset at delays in processing of asylum claims and the conditions in which they are being held. Afghanistan's interim leader, Hamid Karzai has said that he "will raise this issue and try and ask the Australian Government to accept them." According to a report published in the daily Frontier Post, Pakistan, thousands of Afghan asylum-seekers in Britain may be ordered to return home.

4. Pakistan

About 2,000 supporters of Afghanistan's ousted Taliban rallied in Peshawar, Pakistan, to denounce the crackdown on radical Islamic groups.

5. Regional Developments

Iran's defense minister Ali Shamkhani has stated that the continued presence of US in the region is "certainly a matter of worry for us." Ehsan Ahrari's essay in Asia Times argues that Iran's foreign policy reflects the country's internal politics. He goes on to suggest that the chances of rapprochement between the United States and Iran are remote.

Sergei Blagov's essay in Asia Times argues that "the Kremlin is making every effort to maintain its military muscle in Central Asia."

The State of the Union speech of US President George Bush has not been well received by most countries in the region.

Hundreds of US troops have reportedly begun a joint military operation in the southern Philippines against Abu Sayyaf guerillas. According to survey mentioned in a report carried by the Far Eastern Economic Review, 84% of Filipinos favor U.S. assistance for the Philippine military in its fight against the Abu Sayyaf.

India-Pakistan Tensions

1. News

India rejected Pakistan's calls for phased withdrawal of troops from the border and resumption of talks between the two countries. In a new twist to standoff between India and Pakistan, India's Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee ruled out talks until Pakistan returns 'Pakistan-occupied-Kashmir' to India.

According to unnamed "highly placed intelligence sources" quoted in a report appearing in the daily Hindustan Times, India, Pakistan army is trying to "completely wipe out ground support for army and district authorities (in Pir Panjal region of Kashmir) as pre-war tactics." Indian police has claimed killing "two Pakistani terrorists with ISI links" allegedly involved in the attack on American Center at Kolkata.

2. Analysis

B. Muralidhar Reddy's essay in Frontline, an Indian magazine, argues that there are clear signs that

"a large section of Pakistani society wants an end to the conflict and a new beginning in the country's relations with India." In the same magazine, Praveen Swami examines the strategies and scenarios as the standoff between Indian and Pakistani troops continues.

Pakistan

1. Pakistan: Domestic Situation

The Pakistan government has reconstituted the anti-terrorist courts by including one senior military officer as one of the three judges presiding over the tribunal. According to a report in the daily News, Pakistan, National Crisis Management Cell (NCMC) of the Interior Ministry is emerging as the leader of the country's future anti-terrorist apparatus.

Pakistan's Jamaat-e-Islami has claimed that President Pervez Musharraf had threatened to quit three days ahead of his January 12 address to the nation in the face of vehement opposition from military commanders to his stand on terrorism, Indo-Pakistani relations and the Kashmir issue.

Political commentator Imtiaz Alam essay in the daily News, Pakistan, argues that "General Musharraf may cause a popular religious reaction by his half-baked, half-hearted measures against religious extremism while keeping the liberal-democratic forces in the dock."

Various reports in Pakistani newspapers examine the motives and actors behind the kidnapping of Wall Street Journal journalist Daniel Pearl.

India

1. India: Domestic Situation

The General Secretary of Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) Praveenbhai Togadia has said that his party would not put off the date of construction of a temple to Hindu god Rama at the site in Ayodhya town where the 16th century Babri Mosque was demolished on Dec 6, 1992. J.P.Shukla's essay in the daily Hindu, India, argues that Hindu nationalist parties will continue to keep the issue alive for their own political purposes.

The Hindu, India, reported on a conference in Bhopal, India, aimed at charting out an economic agenda for transforming the Dalits' (low-caste Hindus) socio-economic conditions.

R N Kaw, founder of the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) - India's foreign intelligence agency - died recently. A report in Tehelka.com gives a brief history of the agency.

According to a report published by Tehalka.com, 70,000 tones of steel debris from the World Trade Center terrorist attack that is being shipped to India for recycling may contain toxic compounds.

2. China-India Relations

K.K.Katyal article in the daily Hindu, India, argues that India should build upon the openings for better ties offered by the recent visit of Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji's to India.

Kashmir

1. Internal Situation

Various newspaper published reports on the law and order situation in Jammu and Kashmir.

Writing for Frontline, an Indian magazine, Praween Swami argues that Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf's attempted crack down on Islamic militants is not likely to change ground realities in Jammu and Kashmir.

The All-Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) - an umbrella organization of 23 political parties in Kashmir - has announced that it would constitute "an independent, impartial and honest Election Commission so that the real representatives of the people of the State are chosen out of a credible democratic process." The Indian daily Times of India called the idea "completely quixotic" and "impractical."

Excerpts from an interview of Farooq Abdullah Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, published in the daily Hindu, India.

Sri Lanka

1. News

An essay in Frontline, an Indian Magazine, suggests that the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) might be losing sympathy in India and, particularly, in Tamil Nadu. Nirupama Subramanian examines the on going ongoing Norwegian-facilitated peace process between LTTE and the Sri Lanken government.

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