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Nuclear Issues

1. Related News and Analysis

During his visit to the US, Pakistan's President General Pervez Musharraf stated that there are "certain indications" that India is planning a new nuclear test. President Musharraf's claim was denied by the Indian government and criticized in the Indian Press. Pakistan later claimed that President Musharraf's statement was based on an unconfirmed report.

Russia signed a \$1.5 billion contract to supply India with two nuclear reactors.

Afghanistan

1. Current Situation

Clashes between local warlords in Paktia, Khost and Mazar-e-Sharif have challenged the authority of Afghanistan's interim government. Hamid Karzai, the head of interim Afghan government has asked for more international peacekeepers to protect his fragile government.

Armed robbers killed six people in Southern Afghanistan.. Afghan Haj pilgrims, angry over plane delays, attacked and killed Afghanistan's interim transport minister at Kabul airport. As a part of general amnesty for foot soldiers, interim Afghan leader Hamid Karzai pardoned 350 captured Taliban soldiers, saying they were "innocent". Karzai warned these soldiers not to take up arms again and "to find jobs".

According to a report, missile strike from an unmanned US aircraft in Zhawar, eastern Afghanistan, killed ordinary peasants. Another report, first published in the Washington Post, claimed that the US has paid over \$7 million to various Afghan warlords in exchange for their help in war against the Taliban.

2. Reconstruction

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has launched a campaign to vaccinate nine million Afghan children against measles and rubella. Afghanistan's postal service has resumed operations for the first time in more than two decades.

According to a report in the daily Frontier Post, Pakistan, important Afghan political figures have been sidelined in a 21-member commission formed by the UN for laying the groundwork for the convening of a grand assembly in Afghanistan.

3. Humanitarian Crisis

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) moved the last of about 45,000 Afghans from Jallozai camp to new sites. Jallozai, a makeshift refugee camp, was called a "humanitarian nightmare" by the UNHCR. The daily News, Pakistan, reported that the Taliban might have massacred thousands of Hazaras, a minority Shia Muslim ethnic group, in 1997 and 1998.

According to Maulana Abdul Sattar Edhi, the founder of Edhi Foundation of Pakistan, about three million shelter less Afghan women and children are facing starvation and diseases due to persistent drought and prolonged civil war. Edhi Foundation has been engaged in relief work in Afghanistan.

4. Regional Developments

The governor of Kandahar Gul Agha has accused Iran of interference in Herat and other Provinces. The governor of Herat, however, has denied these charges. Iranian authorities have closed down the offices of Afghan guerrilla leader, and the chief of Hizb-e-Islami, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. Pakistan government has stated that Hekmatyar would not be allowed into Pakistan. In his report for the daily News, Pakistan, Rahimullah Yusufzai gives a background to the decision by the Iranian government to close down the offices of Hekmatyar.

According to an unconfirmed report, Pakistan has handed over to Kabul a list of its 877 citizens being held by various Afghan warlords since the fall of Taliban and demanded their immediate repatriation.

5. General Assessments

In an interview with the Far Eastern Economic Review, the secretary general of Amnesty International Irene Khan has voiced concern that the US's war on terrorism could lead to human rights abuses.

India-Pakistan Tensions

1. News

India has again asked Pakistan to hand over 20 alleged fugitives. Meanwhile, two Indian nationals, allegedly involved in last month's attack on the American Center in Kolkata, were arrested in New Delhi after being deported by Dubai.

2. US Role

The US President George W. Bush has indicated that his country will continue to press for dialogues between India and Pakistan. India, however, has reiterated its rejection of third party intervention in Indo-Pakistan affairs. Raja Mohan, commentator for the daily Hindu, India, believes that India should "grab the opportunity to cooperate with the world in transforming the subcontinent." In an essay for the daily Nation, Pakistan, Mubashir Hasan, a senior Pakistani politician and former federal minister, argues that long term US presence in South Asia would have adverse impact on the future well being of the region.

Pakistan

1. Pakistan: Domestic Situation

Chief Justice Lahore High Court has restrained the federal government from taking any step under the presidential ordinance to induct army officers into the Anti-Terrorism Courts (ATCs). According to a report in the daily News, Pakistan, the government's decision to restructure the courts was taken without consultation with the judiciary.

According to a survey, the family planning needs of 61 per cent of Pakistani women are not being met. Activists, locals and Imams of different mosques in Islamabad, Pakistan, staged a demonstration against an imam of a mosque for evicting his five-month pregnant wife from his house.

In an essay for the daily News, Pakistan, writer Masooda Bano argues that Pakistan's education system needs immediate investment and improvement. Pervez Hoodbhoy's article argues that "Pakistan's present crisis desperately demands reflection upon the ruinous impact of its past plans and policies."

2. Daniel Pearl Case

Reports in various Pakistani newspapers have been examining the complex course of the investigation into the kidnapping of Wall Street Journal reporter Daniel Pearl. The investigation has so far involved a number of militant Islamic groups and also some former military intelligence officers.

3. US-Pakistan Relations

The US President George Bush has announced an economic package for Pakistan that includes a proposal to Congress for \$1 billion in debt relief, additional \$100 million for education and \$142 million in increased market access for Pakistani apparel exports. Pakistan and the US have signed an "Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement (ACSA)." Under the agreement, US would initially pay around \$300-500 million to Pakistan for the logistic support and services it provided to the US forces in its war in Afghanistan.

India

1. Domestic Situation

First reports on elections in Uttar Pradesh (UP) and Uttaranchal indicate that the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is doing better than expected. Polls in UP pose a major test for the ruling BJP and, according to a report in the Far Eastern Economic Review, a loss by BJP would "undermine the central government's long-term viability." Writing for the daily News, Pakistan, columnist Praful Bidwai suggests that "if the BJP is decisively defeated in UP, the situation in India will become conducive to greater internal democratization."

The daily Hindu, India, published a two-part report on the "Bhopal Document" - issued under the auspices of the Madhya Pradesh governments. The document examines the present condition and future prospects of Dalits (former Untouchables) in India.

In an essay for Frontline, an Indian magazine, Sukumar Muralidharan argues that the push by militant Hindu parties like Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) to build a temple in Ayodhya could threaten the survival of Vajpayee government.

Kashmir

1. Internal Situation

Newspapers in India and Pakistan reported continuing violence and protests in Kashmir.

The All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC), an umbrella organization of twenty-three Kashmiri political groups, has set up its own six-member election commission. The commission is aimed at holding 'people's elections' for selecting representatives to discuss Kashmir's future in trilateral talks with Pakistan and India. Columnist Praful Bidwai believes that the election proposal "could well open a dialogue with the Indian government and with civil society groups."

2. US Role

The US has ruled out both mediation and facilitation to resolve the Kashmir issue.

Related Regional News

1. Philippines

The Philippines and the US have signed the "terms of reference" covering the six-month military exercises aimed at helping Philippines wipe out the Abu Sayyaf. An Asia Times editorial argues that the US should be concerned more with Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) than the Abu Sayyaf.

2. Miscellaneous News

Pakistan and Iran are scheduled to discuss the development of gas pipeline project between Iran and India via Pakistan. A Jordanian court has convicted a US-born Islamist, Raed Hijazi, of training in Afghanistan's al-Qaeda camps. Hijazi was later sentenced to death.

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