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Nuclear Issues

1. India Nuclear Policy

In an editorial for the Times of India, Manoj Joshi writes that while India claims to possess the capability to retaliate against a nuclear first strike, the government's response to the Gujarat earthquake shows that it is unprepared to respond to a disaster.

Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh stated that India can't pursue unilateral nuclear disarmament because of the relevance of nuclear weapons as a deterrent force, though India remains committed to their global elimination. Singh also spoke against growing legitimization of terrorism, including jihad, as an implement of foreign policy.

2. US Nuclear Sanctions

Contrary to earlier reports that incoming US President George W. Bush had granted waivers of certain sanctions against India, specifically permitting the sale of British-made Sea King helicopter parts, the waiver was one of the final acts of outgoing President Bill Clinton.

Earthquake

1. Musharraf-Vajpayee Phone Conversation

Pakistan Chief Executive Pervez Musharraf spoke by phone with Indian Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, the first contact at that level between India and Pakistan in 15 months, to convey sympathies regarding the earthquake. Vajpayee expressed gratitude for Pakistan's concern and for sending relief materials.

The Dawn reported a controversy over the Musharraf-Vajpayee phone conversation, with conflicting reports as to which leader initiated the call. The Dawn reported that, following a public statement by Indian Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee that he was interested in thanking Pakistan Chief Executive Pervez Musharraf, the call was arranged through diplomatic channels.

The pro-Pakistan Hizbul Mujahideen released a statement welcoming the Musharraf-Vajpayee phone call, calling it an important step for bilateral relations.

2. Impact of Phone Conversation

Pakistani government sources suggest that Pakistan would like to use the opportunity of the positive Vajpayee-Musharraf phone call to resume their bilateral dialogue. Pakistani Major General Rashid Qureshi, head of the military's Inter-Service Public Relations, said, "It is certainly a positive sign and development." Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah praised the phone call, and said that he hoped that militant groups would follow suit and be peaceful.

3. India-Pakistan Relations

The Hindu reported that hundreds of Pakistanis are seeking visas to visit relatives in earthquake-ravaged areas.

An Indian Foreign Ministry spokesman stated that there was no plan for Pakistan Chief Executive Pervez Musharraf to visit Gujarat.

4. PRC Humanitarian Aid

The PRC sent US$600,000 in humanitarian supplies and cash to India to aid earthquake relief.

India

1. Military Programs

Chief of the Indian Naval Staff Admiral Sushil Kumar stated in an interview that India was in talks with France and Russia with the goal of building 24 hunter-killer submarines. India hopes to restart its submarine construction lines at Mazagaon docks.

Mikhail Pogosyan, head of Russia's Sukhoi aircraft company, stated that Sukhoi is open to helping India build its Light Combat Aircraft (LCA). While Russia is several years behind the US-planned Joint Strike Fighter, Sukhoi may also offer India joint participation in a fifth-generation fighter.

The LCA had a second successful test-flight, staying airborne for about 20 minutes before landing.

NK Pant, a retired Indian military officer, writes in a new article for the New Delhi-based Institute for Peace and Conflict Studies that US sanctions imposed after the 1998 Pokhran nuclear tests have adversely affected India's military readiness, and that India must put pressure on the US to lift the sanctions.

2. Foreign Relations: France, Nepal

India and France held their sixth round of strategic talks. French President Jacques Chirac stated France's support for India's permanent membership in the UN Security Council.

India has indicated to Nepal that it is open to discussing the future of the 1950 Treaty of Peace and Friendship. The Hindu reports that India is frustrated that Nepal is not fulfilling its obligations under the treaty, while Nepal sees the treaty as unequal in nature.

3. Ceasefire Commentary

In an editorial in the Times of India, V.P. Malik, a former Chief of the Indian Army Staff, argues that the ceasefire is part of a long-term strategy to resume the India-Pakistan dialogue, but that Pakistan's sincerity and its support for violence must be evaluated. Malik argues that Pakistan and militant groups underestimate India's political and economic strengths, and therefore put weight on individual tactics of violence rather than their long-term interests.

Indian Home Minister LK Advani stated that India was prepared to hold talks with militant groups to bring peace to Kashmir. Advani stated that talks could cover any issues, "except on the matter of nationality and sovereignty."

Former Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto stated that she supported India's initiatives for encouraging a peace dialogue between India and Pakistan.

Amitabh Mattoo, Director of the National Security Program at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, writes in The Hindu that the relief felt at the extension of the ceasefire is being overwhelmed by the reality that real peace will be elusive for some time. Mattoo states that the ceasefire has led to tangible gains, including a reduction in the harassment of civilians and an increased ability to identify and isolate those groups that perpetuate violence. He argues that despite the failure of the All-Parties Hurriyat Conference to respond meaningfully to the ceasefire, India needs to implement policies that recognize and promote the gains made by the ceasefire.

4. Kashmir Force Cuts

The Hindu reports that the Indian government is considering a reduction in forces in Kashmir as part of a plan to redeploy forces to promote the peace process without compromising security. The process will take three months. The Hindu argues that, in conjunction with the ceasefire, this further reduction in border tensions is unlikely to lead to dialogue with Pakistan unless Pakistan reins in militant groups.

The Dawn argues that this reduction by India is in response to Pakistan's withdrawal of troops from along the Line of Control. The Deccan Herald stated that the withdrawn force was division-sized, but this was not confirmed by the Indian Army.

An editorial in The Dawn stated that, coming after Pakistan's stated withdrawal along the Line of Control, India's promise to cut troops in Kashmir should promote peace. The editorial is also critical of militant groups for their failure to clearly state the political goals behind their violence.

5. India-PRC Ties

An essay in Frontline Magazine states that the visit of PRC leader Li Peng is a sign that relations between India and the PRC have strengthened significantly since the Pokhran nuclear tests. While there were initial efforts to downplay expectations of the visit by both the PRC and India, it appears that relations are moving forward. There have been recent successes in moving forward the border issue and track-two strategic talks with Russia.

Atul Aneja reported in The Hindu that Shirin Tahir-Kheli, Director of the South Asia Program at Johns Hopkins University, stated that the administration of US President George W. Bush is unlikely to perceive India as a frontline strategic partner against the PRC. She also stated that while the US would not push India to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, it would pressure India on arms control issues and would not recognize India formally as a nuclear weapons state.

Pakistan

1. Overview

Bombs detonated in Kabul, the three newest in a series that have exploded recently. There were no major casualties or damage.

2. US F-16 Account

The Dawn reported that the US government has informed Pakistan that it must import soy beans at "exorbitant" prices from the US to exhaust the US$80 million Pakistan has remaining in its account

originally designated for the purchase of F-16 fighter planes. The Dawn reported that the US has said that this is the only way Pakistan can recoup its loss, or else the US will just close the account.

3. Pakistan-India Relations

Two days after a phone conversation with Indian Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, Pakistan Chief Executive Pervez Musharraf attacked India's "oppressive" rule in Kashmir. The Pakistan Foreign Office reiterated the request that India grant passports to the leadership of the All-Parties Hurriyat Conference to enable their visit to Pakistan.

In an opinion essay in The Dawn, Ahmed Sadik argued that, for political and economic reasons, Pakistan is not in a good position to rule out options for solving the Kashmir issue. Sadik also argues in favor of focusing Pakistan's efforts with the US under President George W. Bush on the US Defense Department, rather than the State Department.

Kashmir

1. UN Observation Team

Defense attaches from the permanent members of the UN Security Council visited Pakistan-administered Kashmir to observe the effects of the two-month unilateral ceasefire by India.

2. APHC Visit

Three senior leaders of the All-Parties Hurriyat Conference met in India with Pakistan High Commissioner Qazi Ashraf Jehangir and discussed their planned trip to Pakistan. Details are not available on the content of their meeting.

3. Recent Violence

A curfew was imposed in Srinagar after eight Sikhs were killed by militants. The killings were believed to be in response to the recent killing of a Muslim.

Sri Lanka

1. Peace Talks

Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga indicated a more open perspective to negotiating with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to end the long conflict. She stated, "Our position is that we will commence negotiations for a peaceful settlement and if these negotiations progress satisfactorily, we can explore prospects of a genuine cease-fire."

Norwegian peace envoy Erik Solheim returned to Sri Lanka this week. The media is speculating that there was progress in his talks with the LTTE, and will propose to the Sri Lankan government that it lift restrictions on the LTTE-held north, with the LTTE reciprocating by not attacking areas in the south.

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