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India

1. Foreign Relations: General & US

An essay in the Times of India was supportive of Indian diplomacy in 2000, which pushed ahead

relations with Russia, the US and the PRC, but argued that there was still no thaw in India-Pakistan relations.

M.D. Nalapat argued in the Times of India that India has exhibited a land-locked mentality that prevents it from appreciating the role that the Indian Navy plays in protecting the country. Nalapat further argued that India and the PRC should develop a strategic partnership to dominate the regional sea lanes, but states that the PRC's relationship with Pakistan inhibits the India-PRC relationship from developing. A second essay by Nalapat examined the prospective US administration policy under President-elect George W. Bush.

A report by the US-based think-tank RAND, co-authored by Zalmay Khalilzad, stated that the US should develop a foreign policy towards India that is independent of its regional role. The report was also critical of Pakistan's role in Kashmir and Afghanistan. Khalilzad has been named as a member of President-elect George W. Bush's transition team.

2. India-PRC Relations

Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) chief Gautam Kaul stated that the PRC's People's Liberation Army does not threaten India because it is far from the border. Kaul requested an additional 3,500 troops to replace those transferred to anti-militancy operations in Kashmir.

3. India-Sri Lanka Relations

Indian fisherman taken into custody by the Sri Lankan Navy reported that they had been forced to fish for the Navy before being released.

4. Military Hardware

India and Russia signed a deal worth more than US\$3 billion for the production of 140 Sukhoi Su-30MKI multi-role jets in India. The "deep" license allows India to domestically produce all components of the jets. The Times of India quoted Russian media as stating that it was the largest deal Russia had ever signed with a foreign country.

Israel has suspended negotiations with India over the sale of the Phalcon radar system because of the change of the US presidency. The US is expected to oppose the deal, reportedly feeling that it will upset the balance of power between India and Pakistan.

India announced that its Light Combat Aircraft (LCA), an indigenously developed multi-role fighter plane, is ready for test flights. The Indian Air Force is expected to require 200 LCAs over the next fifteen years.

5. Ceasefire

Indian Home Minister L.K. Advani reported that talks would be held between the National Democratic Alliance government and the National Conference before the government moved forward to talks with militant groups.

Indian Home Minister L.K. Advani repeated that the government would examine Pakistani behavior during the ceasefire before agreeing to talks with Pakistan. He also repeated that India would review the situation in Kashmir after the extended deadline of the current ceasefire and decide its future policy then. Indian Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee stated that the government will initiate talks with representative groups in Kashmir, but said Pakistan had not done enough to demonstrate proof of its interest in talks.

Indian Defense Minister George Fernandes and Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah independently stated that Pakistan has not begun to withdraw its troops from along the Line of Control, contradicting Pakistani claims otherwise. Fernandes cited Indian Army reports, which also stated that there has been no firing from the Pakistani side of the border since the withdrawal announcement.

Pakistan

1. Local Elections

Eighteen districts held local elections in Pakistan for seats in municipal and district councils, and elections in the rest of the 106 districts will be staggered over the next several months.

2. Terrorism

A series of four bombs exploded in Pakistan, injuring 45 people. Pakistani police blamed India for the explosions, arguing that the bombs were in retaliation for the recent attack upon India's Red Fort. The Jash-e-Mohammed militant group attributed the attacks to India's Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), and threatened to carry out suicide attacks in Indian cities in response.

Kashmir

1. Ceasefire

An editorial in the Times of India by Siddharth Varadarajan argues that a military ceasefire is insufficient to solve the Kashmir crisis and that an equally significant political initiative must also be pursued. Varadarajan further argues that rule of law must prevail in Kashmir, and that the All-Parties Hurriyat Conference has a role in ensuring Pakistan and militant groups adhere to the ceasefire.

2. Ceasefire Statements: Hizbul Mujahideen

Hizbul Mujahideen commander Masood stated that the Hizbul would not lay down its arms to participate in political talks. Masood said, "Even if the ongoing process is on the right track and Hizbul Mujahideen decides to extend its support, guns will not come down from our shoulders because complete independence of Kashmir is the foremost goal."

3. APHC Visit to Pakistan

The Indian government cleared passports for six of the seven All-Parties Hurriyat Conference executive members, with only Muslim League Syed Ali Shah Geelani being denied a passport. The APHC team will travel to Pakistan to hold talks with the government and militant groups. All-Parties Hurriyat Conference leader Mirwaiz Umar Farooq stated that India should leave the composition of the team up to the APHC and should approve all seven passport requests.

Hizbul Mujahideen commander Syed Salahuddin stated that the visit to Pakistan by All-Parties Hurriyat Conference members would not be helpful unless all seven went to Pakistan, and that not allowing all of them to go was an attempt by India to divide the Kashmiri leaders.

4. Recent Violence

The Lashkar-e-Taiba reported that it had acquired PRC anti-aircraft guns and 60mm heavy mortars for use in Jammu and Kashmir. The Lashkar has also been using mobile phone systems to organize.

The links below provide coverage of violence that occurred in the past week in Jammu and Kashmir.

Sri Lanka

1. Government Ceasefire

The Sri Lankan Army announced a one-day ceasefire for Christmas. Army Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne stated that the one-day ceasefire was unrelated to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) unilateral ceasefire.

An editorial in the Times of India reported that the government of Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga is convinced that the LTTE's ceasefire offer is another ploy to regroup and rearm for offensives, and therefore the Army will not relax its offensives until the LTTE is engaged in negotiations.

2. Military Actions

Sri Lankan troops retook the Navatkuli bridge, a key link between Jaffna and Chavakachcheri. Army Brigadier Sanath Karunaratne stated that there has been little rebel resistance to recent Army offensives.

3. UN Diplomat

Sri Lanka has asked the UN to withdraw British diplomat Peter Witham from his post in Sri Lanka. Witham had been supportive of Tamil issues, and Sri Lanka is accusing him of meddling in Sri Lankan domestic affairs.

4. Humanitarian Issues

More than 75,000 Sri Lankans were left homeless after a storm caused floods and destroyed houses.

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