SANDNet Weekly Update, March 19, 2002

Recommended Citation

SANDNet, "SANDNet Weekly Update, March 19, 2002", SANDNet, March 19, 2002,
https://nautilus.org/sandnet/sandnet-weekly-update-march-19-2002/

CONTENTS
March 19, 2002
Volume 3, #10

Nuclear Issues

1. Related News and Analysis

Afghanistan

1. Current Situation
2. Reconstruction
3. Humanitarian Crisis

India-Pakistan Tensions

1. News
2. Analysis

Pakistan

1. Pakistan: Domestic Situation

India

1. India: Domestic Situation

Kashmir

1. Internal Situation
2. India and Pakistan

Regional News

1. Bangladesh

2. Nepal

Nuclear Issues

1. Related News and Analysis

During his visit to Japan, Pakistan's President Pervez Musharraf stated that "we are not for nuclear escalation. We only want to maintain deterrence." India's Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh believes that the need to abolish nuclear weapons has taken on a "new urgency" since September 11th. Journalist A. G. Noorani reviewed three new books on nuclear weapons in South Asia.
"N-arms race with India ruled out: CTBT signing needs time: President"

Afghanistan

1. Current Situation

US Vice President Dick Cheney has stated that the Taliban and its al-Qaeda allies have been permanently defeated. Reports in Pakistan press, however, have claimed that some Taliban and al-Qaeda fighters may have escaped from Shah-e-Kot. US troops killed 16 people in an attack on a convoy reportedly carrying al-Qaeda guerillas in eastern Afghanistan.
"16 killed in US bombing near Gardez"

According to a report in the daily Frontier Post, Pakistan, this spring's crop of opium poppy in Afghanistan will reach the levels attained before the Taliban banned poppy cultivation in July 2000. In an essay for the Frontline magazine, Osmund Bopearachchi, Director of Research, Center National de la Recherche Scientifique, Paris, examines the destruction of Afghanistan's cultural treasures during the period of the civil war.

2. Reconstruction

Former Afghan King Zahir Shah, presently living in exile in Italy, is expected to arrive in Kabul on March 25 to oversee the convening of the Loya Jirga to select a new interim government in June. In separate essays, Kamal Matinuddin and M.H. Askari look at the challenges faced by Zahir Shah. According to a report by the International Crisis Group (ICG), friction between rival ethnic groups and militias is expected to increase ahead of the convening of the Loya Jirga. Writing for the daily News, Pakistan, Rahimullah Yusufzai reports that Afghan interim leader Hamid Karzai's numerous foreign visits are hampering effective functioning of his government.
"As Zahir Shah returns"

Writer Maqbool Ahmad Bhatty believes that are "no signs that the much-talked-about task of reconstruction has been started" in Afghanistan. In an article for the Far Eastern Economic Review, author Ahmad Rashid reports that "the most critical need" in Afghanistan is security.
"Slow return to normality"

3. Humanitarian Crisis

UNHCR is planning to launch a program to facilitate repatriation of Afghan refugees now in Pakistan. In his essay for Asia Times, Nadeem Yaqub reports on refugees returning back to

Afghanistan. A report in the daily Frontier Post examines the effects of the three-year drought in Afghanistan.
"Afghans go home"

India-Pakistan Tensions

1. News

Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has ruled out the resumption of dialogue until Pakistan has met some of India's concerns and demands. Atal Behari Vajpayee, however, has also stated that changes in Pakistan have had "a favorable impact" on the situation in Jammu and Kashmir.
"Ties with Pakistan still tense: India"
"Talks only after cross-border terrorism ends: PM"

2. Analysis

Ahmad Faruqui essay for the Asia Times analyzes data presented in the new edition of The Asian Conventional Military Balance. According to a World Bank report, India-Pakistan tensions are having adverse effect on the economies of the two countries.
"Military scales don't all tip India's way"

Pakistan

1. Pakistan: Domestic Situation

Five people, including a US diplomat's wife and daughter, were killed and 41 others injured in a grenade attack on a church in Islamabad, Pakistan. The Pakistan government has ordered extras security measures around the US installations in the country. The attack was strongly condemned in Pakistani newspapers. Media reports indicate that the attack may have been carried out by organizations reacting to President Musharraf's crack down on militant Islamic groups.
"Five die in Islamabad church attack"
"Extra security for US installations"
"Yet another act of terror"
"Pakistani dissidents play deadly game"

Omar Sheikh, main suspect in the Daniel Pearl murder case, told a Pakistani judge that "America would suffer if he is extradited" to the US. Meanwhile, a man who claimed to have killed Daniel Pearl has retracted his statement.
"America will suffer if I am extradited: Omar Sheikh"

The Pakistan government has reportedly prepared an ordinance that provides for tighter control over religious schools. The government has also directed the provincial home secretaries to stop the publications of all the five banned militant organizations. According to an unconfirmed report, the Pakistani government has asked the four provinces to release those activists of banned religious organizations who are ready to disassociate themselves from their organization permanently.
"Law to tighten control on Madaris soon"
"Provinces told to stop publications of banned outfits"

Essays by Rasul Bakhsh Rais and Kuldip Nayar examine the issue of religion and politics in South Asia.
"Religion and politics"

President Pervez Musharraf has ruled out any possibility of former Prime Ministers Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif of being allowed to stand for election in October's polls. According to an unconfirmed report President Musharraf might hold referendum for the continuation of his tenure as president. In his essay for Asia Times, Muddassir Rizvi suggests that preparations for elections "seem to be geared toward ensuring that President General Pervez Musharraf will have more powers than ever."
"President may seek advice on referendum"
"Musharraf jockeys for poll position"

Kristan Schoultz, country adviser to the UN HIV/AIDS Program, has warned that Pakistan "must act quickly to halt the spread of AIDS."

India

1. India: Domestic Situation

Sporadic communal violence continued in India. Militant Hindu parties have insisted that they will continue to push for the construction of Ram temple at Ayodhya. According to a report in the daily Hindu, the violence in Gujarat is creating tensions between Prime Minister Vajpayee's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the more right wing Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). Meanwhile, Indian opposition political parties have demanded a ban on the VHP and the Bajrang Dal.
"Renewed violence in Gujarat"
"VHP, Bajrang Dal men storm Orissa Assembly"
"We will take land by force, says Nyas chief"
"RSS-BJP rift may widen"
"Allies, Opposition for ban on VHP, Bajrang Dal"

Indian newspapers carried a large number of analyses of communal violence in Gujarat.
"Understanding Gujarat"
"Destroying the house that Gandhi built"
"Crossing all limits"

A Bill to ratify the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (POTO) was passed by the lower house of the Indian Parliament.

Kashmir

1. Internal Situation

Continued political violence was reported in Jammu and Kashmir. Widespread protests were reported in response to the derogatory remarks about Kashmir's holiest shrine made by Vinay Katiyar, a leader of the VHP. The Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Farooq Abdullah demanded the immediate arrest of Katiyar. Yasin Malik, a leader of The All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC), has stated that his organization is prepared to participate in state elections on condition

that these be held under an independent Kashmir election commission.
"11 die in Kashmir"
"16 killed in Kashmir"
"Strike brings Valley to a standstill"
"Farooq demands arrest of BJP MP"

A report in the daily Indian Express examines the effects of prolonged violence in Kashmir on women's mental state. Columnist Muzamil Jaleel examines the theories put forward by the Valley intelligentsia on why Kashmiri Muslims did not react to the Gujarat carnage.

2. India and Pakistan

India's Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has challenged the separatist organizations of Jammu and Kashmir to participate in the coming Assembly elections.

Regional News

1. Bangladesh

Tabibul Islam's essay in Asia Times looks at the debate on whether or not Bangladesh should opt out of the Least Developed Countries group.
"Bangladesh: To be or not to be least developed"

2. Nepal

Many Maoist guerrillas were reportedly killed in attacks by Nepalese security forces.

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