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Nuclear Issues

1. Related News and Analysis

Jane's Defence Weekly reported that the Indian Air Force plans to acquire 126 Mirage 2000-5 fighter planes for its proposed strategic nuclear command. Brahma Chellaney essay in the daily Hindustan Times argues that in the years ahead nuclear weapons will play a "a greater, not lesser, role" in international relations."

Afghanistan

1. Current Situation

A severe earthquake has killed thousands of people in northern Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the presence of landmines in the effected area is making relief efforts difficult.

The coalition forces have reportedly suffered ambush by al-Qaeda and taliban fighters. 258 captives held in Shibarghan prison for the past four months have been released. According to a report in the daily Frontier Post, the attempted crackdown on drug trade by the interim Afghan government has not been very effective. The Frontier Post also reported that al-Qaeda and Taliban fighters are trying to regroup in eastern Afghanistan.

["Two Afghans killed"](#)

["258 Afghan Taliban prisoners released"](#)

2. Reconstruction

The scheduled return to Afghanistan of former king Zahir Shah has been delayed until some time in April. Syed Saleem Shahzad's essay in Asia Times suggests that differences between supporters of the Northern Alliance and those of former monarch Zahir Shah has been growing. According to a report first published in the Washington Post, the US government spent millions of dollars in the nineteen eighties to supply Afghan schoolchildren with textbooks "filled with militant Islamic teaching and violent images."

["No red carpets in Afghanistan just yet"](#)

["US supplied textbooks with violent images to Afghans"](#)

3. Humanitarian Crisis

Faced with an "unexpected and unmanageable" turn out, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) had to temporarily suspend its Voluntary Repatriation Program. The UNHCR is actively encouraging Afghan refugees in Pakistan to return home.

India-Pakistan Tensions

1. News

There has been no progress towards the pull back of Indian and Pakistani armies away from the border between the two countries.

["Pak. must respond to global call to end terrorism: PM"](#)

["Enough evidence given to Pak"](#)

["Stop infiltration, says PM"](#)

2. Analysis

In his essay for the daily Hindu, Michael Krepon stresses the need for "a sustained and substantive dialogue (between India and Pakistan) centred on escalation control, nuclear risk reduction, and the Kashmir issue."

["The South Asian stalemate"](#)

Pakistan

1. Pakistan: Domestic Situation

According to unconfirmed reports in Pakistani newspapers President Pervez Musharraf is planning to become president for five years through a referendum. Pakistani political parties have indicated that they would block the referendum. Pervez Musharraf's assumption of the office of the President has also been challenged in the Supreme Court. Meanwhile, the Pakistani government prevented supporters and activists of the Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD) from holding a public meeting.

["Presidential referendum expected in May"](#)

["Musharraf's assumption of presidency challenged"](#)

No progress has been in the investigation into a grenade attack on a church in Islamabad that killed five people. As a result of the attack, four senior police officers of Islamabad were suspended from their posts. President Musharraf has expressed his concern about the failure of the police to arrest militants and, according to an unconfirmed report, has ordered the arrest of "all the persons who have been directly or indirectly involved in militant and Jihadi activities." The attack on the church is being viewed in the Pakistan media as evidence that the jihadi and sectarian elements have decided to strike back at Musharraf's government. Meanwhile, according to the State Bank of Pakistan, the country's economy has "not shown perceptible signs of improvement in the first half of this fiscal year."

["Four Islamabad police officials suspended"](#)

["Intelligence set-up to be revamped: President"](#)

["Domestic growth shows no sign of improvement: SBP"](#)

2. U.S. - Pakistan Relations

The US government has ordered the departure of all non-essential diplomatic personnel and their families from Pakistan. Commentator Nasim Zehra argues that a close cooperation with the US is not in Pakistan's best interests.

India

1. India: Domestic Situation

There were reports of sporadic communal violence in India. According to the Chairperson of the National Human Rights Commission J.S. Verma, the victims of the Gujarat riots are still living in fear. Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has stated that he would uphold the secular agenda

of his government. Many newspapers and leaders of opposition parties have harshly criticized Prime Minister Vajpayee for his handling of violence in Gujarat.

["Stray incidents in Gujarat"](#)

["People are still insecure in Gujarat: NHRC chief"](#)

["Vajpayee distances govt from hardline Hindu agenda"](#)

["BJP reluctant to read the message"](#)

["Sparks fly over Hindutva issue"](#)

Amid much controversy and acrimony the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Bill was passed by the Indian parliament. Sudha Ramachandran's essay in Asia Times examines some aspects of the bill.

["India's terror law strikes fear"](#)

Kashmir

1. Internal Situation

Continued political violence was reported in Jammu and Kashmir. Indian police arrested Yasin Malik, the president of Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), for his alleged involvement with two individuals arrested on charges of illegally bringing money into Kashmir. Meanwhile, authorities in Kashmir have announced that they will continue to provide protection to Kashmir separatist politicians.

["42 injured in Kashmir blasts"](#)

["Army officer killed"](#)

["Yaseen Malik held under POTO"](#)

Speaking to the leaders of the Indian community in the US, Harry Thomas, Director in charge of South Asia at President Bush's National Security Council, stated that all roads to peace in the region "lead through Kashmir." In his essay for the daily Hindustan Times, Usmaan Raheem Ahmad argues that "a sustainable Kashmir peace process" has to include representatives of the Kashmiri people.

["Overcoming intractability in Jammu and Kashmir"](#)

2. India and Pakistan

India has said that it has no immediate plans to hold formal talks with the All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC). Pakistan army conducted military exercises near its border with India in Kashmir.

["Pak. conducts war games near Kashmir"](#)

Regional News

1. Sri Lanka

The victory of the ruling United National Party (UNF) in local elections has been seen in Sri Lankan newspapers as a "mandate for the peace process" initiated by the UNF government. In keeping with the Ceasefire Agreement signed between the government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), armed Tamil political parties have commenced handing over their arms and ammunition to Security Forces personnel. The daily Hindu reports that V. Prabakaran, the leader of LTTE, will meet the national and international media at a press conference before mid-April. The Asia Times reports that more than 110,000 Tamil refugees living in India may not want to go back home before a permanent peace settlement has been achieved in Sri Lanka.

["Prabakaran to meet media"](#)

["Refugees unwilling to return home"](#)

2. Nepal

Filipino newspapers reported continued operations by the army against Maoist guerrillas. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has asked Maoists to withdraw a five-day strike call.

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