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Nuclear Issues

1. News

For the second time in a month, India test-fired the nuclear-capable medium range 'Prithvi' missile. India reportedly plans to sell missiles to "friendly countries." Nuclear Fuel reported that the US had intelligence about possible Indian nuclear tests. Members of the non-Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) met without Pakistan and India. Both countries have expressed reservations about the NPT. Pakistan plans to reactivate its oldest nuclear plant in July in Karachi and is negotiating with China to build a second nuclear power plant in Chashma.

2. Analysis

M.B. Naqvi (Dawn, Pakistan) argues that deterrence has not and will not work: "the enemy will be deterred only if the adversary, despite being nuked first will make a nuclear riposte." Zafar Nawaz Jaspal (Defence Journal, Pakistan) analyzes India's civilian-controlled nuclear command structure.

India-Pakistan Tensions

1. News

In a speech during his visit to Srinagar, India's Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee extended a 'hand of friendship' to Pakistan and offered restoration of transport links and diplomatic ties. Pakistan also announced reciprocal measures. Jawed Naqwi (Dawn, Pakistan) notes that progress of this peace initiative will depend on how the two countries deal with the Kashmir dispute. The move was welcomed by the US. Religious extremists in both India and Pakistan, with the exception of RSS, have voiced their opposition to the current peace initiative.

India has reportedly expedited its border fencing activities. The Hindu (India) reports a large increase in the use of landmines along the Line of Control (LoC) and a steady scaling down of Indian demining operations.

2. Analysis

The South Asian press cautiously welcomed PM Vajpayee's peace initiative. The Daily Times (Pakistan) urges Pakistan to accept India's moves and let Vajpayee "come up with the parameters for the talks." The Hindu (India) writes that Pakistan must now make a "genuine" effort to curb "terrorist outfits" operating in the country. Husain Haqqani (Indian Express, India) argues that "the two sides need to recognise the difference between isolated rounds of talks and a peace process aimed at creating lasting peace." Pakistan's former Finance Minister Mubashir Hasan (Dawn, Pakistan) believes that Indian and Pakistani elites have "strong vested interests" in maintaining the "no-war no-peace" status quo. M.B. Naqvi (Defence Journal, Pakistan) suggests that the Lahore Summit of 1999 may provide the way for moving the peace initiative forward.

3. Third Party Mediation

An anonymous source reported that US General Jay Garner, in charge of the reconstruction of Iraq, stated a US deadline of December 2004 for finding a permanent solution of the Kashmir dispute (Jang, Pakistan). S. Rajagopalan (Hindustan Times, India) believes that during a visit to South Asia, US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage will put pressure on Pakistan to "end cross-border terrorism and to gingerly nudge India towards resumption of dialogue." India's External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha does not feel that "it will ever be possible" for a third party to impose a solution of the Kashmir dispute. Meanwhile, Pakistan's Foreign Minister, Khurshid Mahmood Kasuri, has again floated the idea of international monitoring of the LoC.

4. India-China-Pakistan Relations

India's Defense Minister George Fernandes visited China in an effort to improve bilateral relations. China has offered its support for resolving the Kashmir dispute in a peaceful manner. Rahul Bedi (Asia Times, Hong Kong) maintains that India's strategy has been not only to encircle Pakistan but also to contain China. Writing for the US Army War College, Mohan Malik cites the growing US-India entente as reason for China to support a stronger Pakistan and ensure that the regional power balance does not tilt in India's favor.

Pakistan

1. Legal Framework Order

A joint constitutional committee of the ruling coalition and the opposition parties has initiated

discussions on the controversial Legal Framework Order (LFO) introduced by President Pervez Musharraf. Adnan Rehmat (News, Pakistan) writes that the political opposition feels that the LFO "institutionalizes their marginalisation from the mainstream." Husain Haqqani (Indian Express) suggests that "Pakistan's latest experiment in "controlled democracy" appears to be faltering." Kunwar Idris (Dawn, Pakistan) argues that the parliamentary system in Pakistan "will remain fragile and its future bleak."

2. News & Reports

Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) leader Qazi Hussein Ahmad has again asked President Musharraf to resign as chief of army staff. The Pakistan Lawyers Forum has petitioned the Lahore High Court to "issue directions to the federal government for the trial of President Gen Pervez Musharraf on high treason charges under Article 6 of the 1973 Constitution."

Pakistani authorities launched an effort to eliminate poppy cultivation in Balochistan. The Dutch Ambassador to Pakistan has said there would be a "100% increase in the crop production in the country, on the completion of the irrigation reforms programs."

3. Afghanistan-Pakistan Relations

Pakistan and Afghanistan have agreed to hold biannual consultations in Islamabad and Kabul alternatively. Ahmed Rashid (Eurasia Net) examines the state of Pakistan-Afghan relations. Hasan Khan (News, Pakistan) reports on border tensions between the two countries. Tahir Amin (News, Pakistan) urges Pakistan to "refrain from interfering in Afghanistan's internal matters" again.

4. US-Pakistan Relations

CIA director George Tenet has stated that "Pakistan continues to support groups that resist India's presence in Kashmir in an effort to bring India to the negotiating table." Lt. Gen. Ehsanul Haq, director general of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) is on an official visit to the US. Dawn (Pakistan) reports that President Musharraf is expected to visit the US in the third week of June. The US has added 11 more Pakistani militant Islamist organizations to its list of "terrorist groups."

India

1. News & Reports

The Netherlands criticized India for its lack of progress in the rehabilitation of riot victims in Gujarat. In Uttar Pradesh, the state government has relaxed requirements for registering madrassas. Cyclones across Assam killed at least 37, injured nearly 300, and left 10,000 homeless.

2. Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS)

India reported a new case of SARS in West Bengal, three days after the World Health Organization (WHO) said the country was free of the deadly flu-like disease, a contradiction addressed in an editorial in The Hindu (India). Because of pilots' unwillingness to fly with attendants who have traveled to SARS-affected countries, Air India has de-recognized the pilots' union.

3. Communal Issues

Vishal Arora (Hindustan Times, India) believes that people are beginning to notice that the Vishwa

Hindu Parishad (VHP) is trying to fan communal passions. The VHP illegally distributed weapons (this time, axes, or 'pharsas') at a rally in the capital of Rajasthan. The People's Union of Civil Liberties (PUCL) released a report detailing the dissemination of arms, foreshadowing Rajasthan as "the next Gujarat."

Historian Romila Thapar strongly criticized rewriting of history textbooks in India. Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Congress members of the Indian Parliament also criticized the 'saffronization' (hinduization) of history textbooks.

The Hindu (India) reports that, a year after the Gujarat carnage, Muslims are still feeling insecure and persecuted in Godhra.

4. Military

India tested the 'Lakshya' pilotless aircraft, which is used primarily for reconnaissance on the battlefield and target acquisition. India continues to press the US and Israel to close the sale of Phalcon Airborne Early Warning And Control System (AWACS) radars, jointly developed by the US and Israel. India and France held high-level defense talks to finalize a technology transfer deal for acquisition and manufacture of advanced fighters. Rediff.com produced a six-part report on a classified US Department of Defense report entitled "Indo-US Military Relations: Expectations and Perceptions."

5. Blackwill's Resignation

US Ambassador to India, Robert Blackwill, announced his resignation and intention to return to academic pursuits at Harvard University. Various reports speculated that Blackwill's diplomatic missteps compelled the US State Department to recall him.

Kashmir

1. News & Reports

According to a report from India's Ministry of Home Affairs, in the past 15 months, nearly 1200 civilians and 500 security personnel have lost their lives in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). Violence continued in the valley. The J&K Finance Minister, Muzaffar Hussain Beigh, survived an assassination attempt and subsequently resigned as chief of the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP). The Daily Times (Pakistan) reported on the dismal condition of Kashmiri refugees. Muzamil Jaleel (Indian Express, India) writes that both militant groups and the army often fight a proxy war in refugee camps.

The government of Pakistan-controlled Kashmir (PCK) rejected a proposal aimed at bringing the Mangla Dam territory under the judicial jurisdiction of Pakistan which would have deprived the PCK of profits from the dam's power station and fishing lake.

2. Indian Kashmir Initiatives

Indian PM Vajpayee visited J&K. The opposition Congress Party welcomed his visit. Praveen Swami (Outlook India), however, observes that "New Delhi needs to understand that the keys to peace lie, not in Srinagar, but in Islamabad - and, more important, to find ways to force open the locks if guardians of the keys continue to prove uncooperative." Vajpayee did not meet with the leader of All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) while APHC refused a meeting with India's J&K emissary (or

"interlocutor"), N.N. Vohra. Members of Kashmir Resolution Movement - a group of separatist politicians who participated in recent elections - did however meet with Vohra. Chief Minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed defended his 'healing touch' policy, revealing a two-pronged strategy of fighting militancy and development via tourism.

Afghanistan

1. News

Floods killed at least 30 people in Helmand province, just north of Kabul. Syed Saleem Shahzad (Asia Times, Hong Kong) explains that the resurgence of Afghanistan's poppy cultivation has once again changed the dynamics of the world opium market. Violent skirmishes continue between remnants of the Taliban and US and Afghan forces.

2. Analysis

Marc Kaufman (Daily Times, Pakistan) concludes that sixteen months later, despite international support, "Afghanistan is still struggling to establish the basics of a working government." As Syed Saleem Shahzad (Asia Times, Hong Kong) describes, indications on the ground stand in stark contrast to US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's declaration that US and Afghan forces have "moved from major combat activity to a period of stability and stabilization and reconstruction activities." Afghanistan has begun submitting lists of wanted "terrorists" to Pakistan to help squash remnants of the Taliban.

Sri Lanka

1. News

The chief negotiator of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), Anton S. Balasingham, arrived in Sri Lanka to hold talks with his leader, V. Prabakaran, and the central committee of the rebel leadership. On the other side, the key Sri Lankan peace negotiator, Milinda Moragoda, is meeting with India's Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha to actively solicit a more proactive role from India in the peace process. The US envoy to Sri Lanka, Ashley Wills, reiterated the US position of a legitimate political role for the LTTE, provided it renounces terrorism and violence, which was also echoed in the US State Department's recent report "Patterns of Global Terrorism."

2. Analysis

Jehan Perera (Outlook India) suggests that the LTTE strategy's to compel the government's cooperation is a response to exclusion from the international donor conference held in Washington in mid-April. The Hindu (India) discusses the Sri Lankan opposition's call for India to more closely monitor the Sea Tigers, the LTTE's naval wing, and the heavy security threat posed if India were to recognize the Sea Tigers as a de facto navy.

Nepal

1. News & Reports

Following up on the January ceasefire, Nepal's government and Maoist rebels sat down for the first round of formal peace talks (Daily Times, Pakistan), though the rebels abruptly suspended their participation at the government's announcement that the talks would be "introductory" (Nepal News, Nepal). A delegation of Nepalese politicians and a Maoist leader traveled to Sri Lanka to learn from the Sri Lanka peace process (The Hindu, India). An editorial from Hindustan Times (India) reviews King Gyanendra's strategy up to the scheduled peace talks. Analysis from The International Crisis Group concludes that "negotiations between the palace and Maoists will not resolve Nepal's problems unless they eventually lead to discussions on a legal and constitutional framework that serves all citizens."

2. Counterterrorism and Human Rights

The US and Nepal signed an agreement strengthening joint participation in counter-terrorism programs. India will provide Rs. 1.87 billion (4 million USD) in military and counterinsurgency assistance to Nepal. Many Nepalese anxiously await the peace talks' outcome, hoping for a redress for killings by both Maoists and the state. According to the newly released Human Rights Yearbook 2003, the Nepali state is responsible for 38% of human right violations while rebels were responsible for 52% of the human rights violations.

Bangladesh

1. News & Reports

Bangladesh is concluding talks with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a \$2 billion aid package. At least 130 people died when a boat, carrying 400 passengers, capsized during a storm, drawing more attention to the lack of proper boating laws and lax enforcement of existing ones.

2. India-Bangladesh Relations

During talks in Dhaka, Bangladesh and India agreed to work on border demarcation, exchange of enclaves, and illegal cross-border movement of people. Bangladesh reaffirmed its commitment to prevent Indian insurgents from using its territory. Amir Khasru and Tarik Ahsan (Weekly Holiday, Bangladesh) hope for a thaw in Indo-Bangla relations, but doubt that the meeting will be more than a repeat of past exchanges.

Regional News

1. SARS

Maldives called an emergency South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) meeting to prevent the spread of SARS in the region. The Chinese government has also indefinitely postponed the opening of its border with Pakistan. Shakti Sharma (Hindustan Times, India) explores the possibility that the South Asians have a "higher level of immunity to the virus."

2. Human Rights

According to Reporters without Borders, regional tension and civic conflict made South Asia among

the worst regions for journalists in 2002. Activists from all over South Asia, including former Indian PM I.K. Gujral, called upon their populations to take a stand against the declining state of human rights in the region. As newly elected members of the UN Human Rights Commission (UNHCR), both India and Pakistan voted against a controversial measure to include sexual orientation as a point of discrimination.

War On Terror

1. News & Reports

Pakistani authorities in Karachi arrested six members of al Qaeda suspected of the USS Cole bombing in October 2000 and are considering a Yemeni request to extradite another al Qaeda suspect, Waleed bin Attash. Pakistani officials denied reports of the arrest of additional al Qaeda members in Balochistan and Karachi.

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Nautilus Institute

608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email:

nautilus@nautilus.org