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Nuclear Issues

1. Pakistani Nuclear Issues

In a CNN interview, President Pervez Musharraf maintained that Pakistan will freeze its nuclear program only if India does so first.

2. Indian Nuclear Issues

The Nuclear Command Authority (NCA) has decided to build two underground bunkers to protect India's political leadership. India will induct new variants of the Prithvi and nuclear-capable Agni II missiles into its arsenal. India could soon commence construction of a prototype advanced heavy water reactor (AWHR), a new kind of reactor that uses a mix of thorium and uranium as fuel and yields more uranium than it actually consumes.

Afghanistan

1. News & Reports

In his address to the UN General Assembly, President Hamid Karzai expressed concern that Afghanistan's stability is threatened by terrorism "embodied in various manifestations, from cross-border infiltration to hateful teachings." In an exclusive interview with Nasim Zehra of Jang (Pakistan), Karzai discusses the present and future of Afghani-Pakistani relations.

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan called on donor nations to extend more financial aid to Afghanistan. International donors pledged nearly US\$5 billion (in Tokyo, in January 2002), but only about US\$2 billion has been delivered. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned that the opium business threatens Afghanistan's economic stability and internal security. Later this month, the UN will pilot a project to disarm over 100,000 ex-combatants.

2. Opinions & Analysis

A security official in a district bordering Pakistan claims that the "rise in power of the Taliban is, unfortunately, in no doubt." The International Crisis Group (ICG) released two reports on Afghanistan: one names the domination of "armed parties and individual commanders...[as] the principal obstacle to implementation of the political process that was agreed at the Bonn conference in late 2001," while the other highlights the volatility of local disputes combined with ethnic polarization.

India-Pakistan Tensions

1. United Nations General Assembly Meeting

During the General Assembly Session, both President Musharraf and Prime Minister Vajpayee gave speeches condemning the shortcoming of the other. Both Indian and Pakistani press criticized the other, though critics agreed in describing either leader's speech as "myopic." Pres. Vajpayee was accused of distorting PM Vajpayee's speech. External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha was quoted as saying that "Pakistan is totally, just totally obsessed with India."

Jammu and Kashmir (J&K) Chief Minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed expressed disappointment in the missed opportunity to normalize ties between India and Pakistan. Pakistan continued to call for talks on Kashmir and India denounced Pakistan's efforts in curbing cross-border terrorism.

Seema Sirohi (Asia Times, Hong Kong) chronicles the encounters that constituted Indo-Pakistani interaction at the General Assembly meeting. Jyoti Malhotra (Indian Express) summed it up this way: "[v]icious insults exchanged between the two sides deepened the divide undermining the hope mere mortals were beginning to build since Vajpayee's April peace initiative." An editorial from Indian Express supports Vajpayee's efforts in meeting Pakistan's challenges, while Harish Khare in the daily Hindu (India) notes that "instead of finding the requisite competence and inspiration to put the terrorists out of business, we wail and bemoan that Pakistan is bleeding us, exporting terror, and fomenting violence."

2. US Involvement

V. A. Pai Panandiker (Indian Express, India) argues that the US is a necessary medium for the peace process in South Asia. In an editorial, M.B. Naqvi (Jang, Pakistan) criticizes the US for intensifying and abetting the arms race on the subcontinent.

Pakistan

1. News & Reports

In regards to quitting as Army chief, Musharraf told the Canadian parliament: "I do understand this [role as Army chief] is not democratic...but under the present circumstances of turmoil in the region, internationally and internally, there is a requirement of stability and unity of command that I am providing." Back in Pakistan, opposition parties protested his right to speak at the UN General Assembly meeting. Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan, head of Pakistan's main opposition group, the Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy, and leader of the Pakistan Democratic Party, died of a heart attack.

2. US-Pakistan Relations

During the US-Pakistan Defense Consultative Group (DCG) meeting, the US agreed to refurbish Pakistan's depleted fleet of F-16s and allow Belgium to sell two squadrons of the aircraft to Pakistan. Also, the US discussed the military sales component of the US\$3 billion announced by Presidents Bush and Musharraf at Camp David in June 2003.

The Pakistani co-chair, Secretary Defense Lt. Gen. (ret.) Hamid Nawaz Khan said, that the "US should use its influence over Israel and India to stop. [Growing Indo-Israeli military ties] will cause imbalance in the conventional weapons area. It will create a threatening situation in South Asia." And in regards to tensions growing tensions with India, Khan continued: "Defence capability is

displayed only in times of test and if India makes any offensive move, we will teach her a lesson. Pakistan is no defenceless ordinary country."

US diplomats will be hosting and visiting Pakistani officials in the coming week: PM Jamali visits Pres. Bush; State Dept. officials Armitage and Rocca will visit Islamabad. The US need for Pakistani troops in Iraq has increased even more because it has finally concluded that India will not offer military support. Ijaz Hussain (Daily Times, Pakistan) recalls the last time Pakistan dispatched troops to help the US, in Somalia in the 1990s, and warns against making a similar misjudgment.

3. Foreign Affairs

A Ministry of Commerce official stated Pakistan's willingness to sign a framework agreement on the South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA) at the upcoming SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) conference. Turkmenistan held talks with Pakistan to strengthen bilateral ties, which included discussion of the Trans-Afghan pipeline. Pakistan will conduct joint maritime exercises with China, its first with a foreign navy.

India

1. News & Reports

The Indian Dept. of Telecom blocked access to the Yahoo Groups website, in an effort to block an alleged anti-India group. Yahoo reps in India refused to remove the material when asked by the government. In complying with the government's request, however, the Internet Service Providers have blocked access to all Yahoo groups and websites. Protests mount all users are inconvenienced. As Devangshu Datta (Business Standard, India) puts it, "This is equivalent to banning all taxis because a taxi was once used to carry a bomb."

Anuradha Nagaraj (Indian Express) and D.K. Singh (Hindustan Times) report from Rajasthan on Bajrang Dal activists destroying a mosque and driving out Muslim families.

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu survived a series of landmine blasts targeting his car. Naxalites, members of the People's War Group, are suspected.

2. Opinions & Analysis

An editorial in the Indian Express states that India has "a stake in the global war against terrorism; but the battles are our very own and they must be fought mostly by ourselves." Firdaus Ahmed (India Together) cautions against "being lied to in the name of security" because the "power imbalance between the pressures for socio-economic development and the hankering for a muscular India results in information emerging as a key and controlled resource."

3. Foreign Affairs

John Cherian (Frontline, India) discusses the aftermath of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's visit, particularly its detrimental effect on India's prestige in the Arab world. With respect to a US-India-Israel axis, the Hindustan Times quotes Defense Minister George Fernandes as saying that "[w]hen one of the countries in the axis has close links with Pakistan, which is the foremost country sponsoring terrorism, this axis does not seem feasible." An Indian defense delegation will visit Israel next month seeking help to build on India's anti-aircraft Trishul and Akash missiles.

Three pieces from the Asia Times (Hong Kong) evaluate three different "strategic triangles." Sultan Shahin examines an alliance with Beijing and Moscow to counterbalance the trend towards a unipolar world. Ramtanu Maitra explains that the broadening Russia-India-Iran relationship goes beyond the situation in Afghanistan. K. Gajendra Singh explores all angles of an India-Israel-Turkey axis, though a clearer alliance emerges with the US as a third element, instead of Turkey.

4. No Troops to Iraq

On the subject of dispatching Indian troops to Iraq, External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha said, "Demands on our own security environment at home has increased in the last few weeks." US Secretary of State Colin Powell stated that India has "indicated [it] would not be in a position to provide troops. And I don't expect that position to change."

Kashmir

1. News & Reports

Yaseen Malik, chief of the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), was acquitted of "aiding and abetting terrorist activities." An army patrol killed 15 militants in what is believed to be a bid by Pakistan to push in militants before heavy snowfall blocks the Kashmiri passes. Thousands of people protested the military's human rights abuses by blocking the Srinagar-Jammu national highway -

Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Liu Guchang on Friday reiterated China's support to the early solution of the Kashmir dispute through the process of dialogue.

2. Opinions & Analysis

Azad ("Free") Jammu and Kashmir Prime Minister Sardar Sikandar Hayat Khan blamed ambiguous US policy for hindering the peace process: encouraging meaningful dialogue between India and Pakistan on the one hand and turning a blind eye to Indo-Israel military links on the other. A Daily Excelsior report details the oft-ignored Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (POK), with its own set of instabilities and human rights violations. In dealing with POK, Ajai Shukla (Indian Express) recommends that the "aspirations in Gilgit-Baltistan must be translated into strong pressure on Pakistan, without creating for the people there the wasteland of misery that Pakistan has created on our side of the [Line of Control]."

In Asia Times (Hong Kong), Sudha Ramachandran discusses the void created with the assassination of Kuka Parrey, a pioneer in the counterinsurgency movement in Kashmir.

Regional News

1. Sri Lanka

The European Union's has excluded the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Elam (LTTE) from its recently released list of individuals and organizations connected with terror activity and reiterated its support for the peace process. An LTTE delegation is scheduled to travel to Ireland to finalize its interim administration proposals based on the recently held Paris talks. The Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) and the LTTE area leaders have been discussing ways to increase cooperation

between the two parties.

Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe has reportedly arranged what is seen as a crucial meeting with President Chandrika Kumaratunga for a proposed alliance between the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP) and the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) People's Liberation Front (JVP). The Daily Mirror (Sri Lanka) reports that the government is planning a "massive public awareness blitz" on the peace process in view of "a huge misinformation campaign carried out by interested parties..." Sri Lanka President Chandrika Kumaratunga warned that minority Muslims were taking up arms against Tamil Tiger rebels.

2. Nepal

According to Nepal News, at least 35 suspected Maoists, as well as four policemen were feared killed in the on going conflict between the government and the Maoists. Kantipur Online notes that Maoist attacks on Nepal's infrastructure will not will "win Maoists new friends in the villages."

3. Bangladesh

Foreign aid commitment to Bangladesh has gone up by 148 per cent, from \$878.75 to \$ 2,179.37 million. Finance and Planning Minister M Saifur Rahman expressed disappointment over 'the recent unfavorable trends' in the flow of Official Development Assistance (ODA) to developing countries. India has agreed to involve Bangladesh in a \$200 billion controversial river-linking project.

The daily Independent (Bangladesh) reports that 2,794 people were killed in separate incidents of violence across the country in last nine months. Mahbub Husain Khan (Independent, Bangladesh) notes "a tendency of intolerance and militancy in certain groups of people who claim to bear the banner of 'true' Islam." Amitabh Shukla (Hindustan Times, India) interviews human rights activist Shahriar Kabira about the "Pakistanisation" of Bangladesh.

4. Philippines

Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) rebels warned that they would not resume peace talks with the government unless troops are pulled out of their former stronghold in Buliok, Maguindanao. President Arroyo has rejected the use of martial law to fight rebel groups and asserted that "our democratic institutions are strong enough to withstand the onslaught of destabilization." The daily Philippines Star views the recent appointment of Eduardo Ermita, a retired army general, as a signal that "the Arroyo administration is ready to give the military solution some rest."

The Philippines government is undertaking extensive security measure for US President George Bush's up coming 8-hour visit to the country.

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Nautilus Institute

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

nautilus@nautilus.org