

INSTITUTE FOR DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

Pakistan

October (1-15) 2016

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FORTNIGHTLY REPORT ON PAKISTAN

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This report is based on the reading of Pakistani media during the last two weeks.

India-Pakistan

There seemed to be a hue and cry over India's surgical strike targeting terrorist launch-pads at several locations along the LoC. Both the security establishment and civilian leaders refused to acknowledge even the existence of strike. Instead they termed it cross-border raid. Pakistan's High Commissioner to India, Mr. Abdul Basit on record stated that no surgical strike had been conducted by the Indian military. It was only a cross-border firing. Both vernacular and English press took this line and argued that Indian claim was unfounded. Some media houses even questioned if India had such capabilities of conducting surgical strikes and then getting away with that without any Pakistani response especially at a time when the Pakistani side was already on a high alert. Instead of asking critical questions, the Pakistani media devoted its energies to save security establishment from being publically humiliated.

The Pakistani side also resorted to their old propaganda that India was trying to divert international attention from human rights violations in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. Besides condemning Indian action at the border, the "AJK" President Sardar Masood Khan argued that New Delhi was trying to hoodwink world opinion. He accused Indian armed forces of committing atrocities against the people of Kashmir. In this, he was also joined by Pakistani President Mamnoon Hussain who on the one hand highlighted that the tension between the two countries would be detrimental, and on the other stated that Kashmiris would soon get Independence and their oppression would come to an end.

Panamagate

There seems to be no end in sight, as far as the Panama Paper leaks are concerned. Both, the opposition and the government is refusing to come down from their positions. PTI chairman Imran Khan again has asked his supporters to reach Islamabad on October 30 as part of his anti-corruption campaign. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, on his part, has asked the Election Commission to dismiss all applications before it as it lacks the power to hear such petitions. The opposition accused Nawaz Sharif of delaying and blocking the investigation. Whereas PTI spokesperson Naeemul Haq argued that PML-N did not want to fight the Panama case, PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto stated that prime minister was blocking every attempt at the panama probe just to save himself.

The Strategic Leak

The English daily Dawn columnist Cyril Almeida filed a report on October 6 which underlined the prevailing tensions in the civil-military relations. The report mentioned that in a meeting civilian government bluntly told the top military leadership that inaction against the militant was leading to Pakistan's international isolation. It also reported an extraordinary verbal confrontation between Punjab Chief Minister Shahbaz Sharif and ISI DG Rizwan Akhtar. Soon after the publication of the report, Cyril Almeida's name was placed in the Exit Control List (ECL). The government denied the claims made in the report and the PMO termed the content of the report speculative, factually incorrect and misleading. The Dawn did not budge. It stood by the reporter and the story filed by him. There were a barrage of criticism in the English press against the action of the government. Putting the journalist's name in the ECL led the English print media unite against the civilian government. In between, the military also came up with the clarification that they did not seek action against the reporter. The

government formed a committee to look into the issue and later removed reporter's name from the ECL. The whole drama around the Dawn report highlighted the nature of civil-military relations in Pakistan.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

The controversy over the CPEC projects is often downplayed in Pakistan. The government claims it to be an all-out solution of Pakistan's all economic problems while the smaller provinces and their leadership demand their due share in the multibillion project. Recently, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif argued that Balochistan province would turn out to be the major beneficiary of this project. Akhtar Jan Mengal, the Chief of Balochistan National Party-Mengal, contradicted Prime Minister and demanded that the federal government make all accords signed regarding Gwadar and CPEC public. He accused that there was an attempt on parts of the Pakistani rulers to snatch away mineral resources of the province including the sea. He even accused the security establishment of establishing more and more security check-posts in the province causing inconvenience to the local population. He categorically stated that "the son of the soil is asked to identify himself and inform them where he is coming from and going." The contradiction somehow indicates that everything is not right with the project and its implementation, as claimed by the ruling PML-N.

The Sharif Kingdom

The apex court of Pakistan, during a hearing on Orange Line Train case, remarked that Pakistan was functioning like an empire. The Chief Justice of the top court even stated that the masses must stand up to the undemocratic attitude of the government. Earlier, PPP leader Aitzaz Ahasan had lashed out at the federal government for not taking enough action against the banned outfits. He

underlined the complete failure of the federal government in implementing the National Action Plan (NAP) in its true spirit.

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