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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

Pakistan uses non-state actors to achieve its foreign policy objectives is an open secret. So is its role in a number of terrorist attacks inside the Indian Territory. The recent indictment of Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) Chief Maulana Masood Azhar by National Investigation Agency (NIA), for perpetrating a deadly attack on Pathankot Air Force base last year, shows that Pakistan has been continuing its policy of using non-state actors as strategic assets. Instead of reining the anti-India jihadis, Pakistan along with Chinese help has been shielding such jet black terrorists. It regularly accuses India of fomenting trouble for Pakistan. The latest addition is “attempts to sabotage CPEC” and “indulgence in Water Terrorism.” India on its part is gearing itself to optimally utilise its share of water in accordance to the provision of Indus Water Treaty (IWT) which Pakistan sees an attempt by India to reduce water inflows into Pakistan. It has even approached the World Bank for arbitration in regards to two Indian hydroelectric power projects—Kishanganga and Ratle.

Pakistan’s Finance Minister Ishaq Dar recently wrote a letter to the World Bank President Jim Yong Kim arguing that delaying the arbitration would seriously prejudice the interests and rights of Pakistan under the IWT. This is not for the first time Pakistan has raised objections to Indian projects. It uses various technical grounds to object any Indian projects even when there is no violation of provisions of the IWT. The political leaders often issue statements that could be not backed by facts on the ground. Jammu and Kashmir Liberation League (JKLL) President Justice (Retd.) Abdul Majeed Mallick has recently accused India of having nefarious designs of suspending the water supply to Pakistan. This is not only unwarranted but totally unfounded too. India has a very clean track record and despite being the upper riparian, it has so far not violated any provision of the IWT.

Internal Politics

Justice Qazi Faez Isa's report on Quetta carnage has dropped a bombshell on the federal and provincial government of Balochistan. The report contained several adverse remarks against the Interior Minister Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan and his ministry. Interior Minister himself came out in open to defend himself. He not only termed the report "one-sided" but also argued that the report was made public without recording his version. The opposition parties seem to be united in condemning the interior minister and asking for his resignation over the issue. PTI leader Shah Mehmood Qureshi not only accused Chaudhry Nisar of attacking the apex court of the country but also posed a number of questions before him. PPP spokesman Farhatullah Babar too argued that in the wake of such a stinging indictment by the inquiry commission, Interior Minister should have resigned himself. He went on to state that the Quetta report had actually exposed how the poor planning and lack of government has resulted in the monumental ineffectiveness of National Action Plan (NAP).

After the Quetta report controversy, Justice (Retd.) Javed Iqbal, the Chairman of the Abbottabad Commission, has demanded to make Abbottabad Commission report public. In his interaction to the media Justice Iqbal said that former Army Chief and former DG ISI were not held responsible for the mishap and asked the government to fulfill its responsibility by implementing the recommendation of the commission.

National Accountability Bureau (NAB) seems to be in the eye of the storm because of its plea bargains. Jammāt-e-Islami Chief Sirajul Haq has termed the plea bargain scheme as the institutionalised corruption by none other than the institution responsible to check the corruption in the country. PTI Chairman Imran Khan echoed the opposition's sentiment and demanded resignation of the present NAB Chief Qamar Zaman Chaudhry. The anti-corruption watchdog had recently drew criticism even from the apex court of Pakistan over the issue of plea bargain. Punjab Chief Minister Mian Shahbaz Sharif has also termed the plea bargain scheme a fraud and called for a review of the NAB law.

Panamagate

The stalemate over Panamagate is continuing. Neither the government, nor the opposition seem to be in a mood to resolve the issue. Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has now asked Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to withdraw the letter of the Qatari Prince from the Supreme Court because there was a contradiction in his speech and the contents of the letter submitted to the apex court of Pakistan. PTI vice chairman even stated that Prime Minister should come to the parliament to explain his passion over this contradiction.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

In Russia, Pakistan found another supporter of multibillion dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). As per the media reports, in his interview on Radio Pakistan Alexey Y Dedov, Russia's ambassador to Pakistan, stated that CPEC was a component of China's Silk Road and his country Russia was also working on a similar Eurasian Economic Union. He further added that China and Russia were having discussions to merge the projects. Meanwhile, the details about the construction activities on the western route of CPEC has been made public. As per the newspaper reports, the work on the 2500 Km long Western Route had commenced in the month of September. Under the project, the 235 Km road from DI Khan to Zhob would be dualised. There are also plans to make Karachi-Peshwar railway tracks signal free in the next phase of CPEC.

Besides, China has also shown interest to set up a steel factory in Gwadar. This information was made public by the acting Chinese Ambassador to Pakistan—Zhao Lijan who stated that to expedite economic development under CPEC China would be setting up a large steel factory at Gwadar. He even responded to the critics of the project through his tweets. In response to the allegation of using prisoners as labour to save costs, Lijan tweeted that it was nonsense.

Ahsan Iqbal, the Federal Minister for Planning, Development and Reform, conceded that so far around \$30 billion had been implemented under CPEC. The Minister argued that CPEC was the biggest project under China's One Belt One Road initiative and further added that CPEC related industrial cooperation would kick-start an economic revolution

in Pakistan as the economic zones would generate investment and employment opportunities in the country.

In a veiled reference to India, Pakistan's new Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Gen. Qamar Javed Bajwa made the oft repeated statement that the enemies of Pakistan were targeting CPEC. He also argued that the armed forces would thwart all the attempts to hurt CPEC.

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