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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 seems to be no improvement in the atmosphere, as far as the relations between India and Pakistan is concerned. The cross-border firing and skirmishes have become a daily affair both sides blaming each-other for the provocation. On political front too, there is a hardening of positions. Pakistani Defence Minister Khawaja Asif recently argued that every Indian war aggression would be responded instantly and befittingly. In response to the recent cross-border firing, Gen. Rahell Sharif stated that his soldiers had given befitting reply to Indians by killing around four dozens of their personnel. He did not stop here but went on argue that Modi had now come to know the capabilities of our armed forces.

On the political front, the Interior Minister Chaudhury Nisar Ali Khan, during his meeting with UK Prime Minister David Cameron, termed India as a biggest irritant to regional peace. He accused India of interfering in the internal affairs of Pakistan. Pakistan's foreign office too joined the India-bashing and quoted Indian Defence Minister's statement out of context and termed it as a manifestation of India's doublespeak and a threat to regional peace and security. As if this was not enough, the Senate Chairman Mian Raza Rabbani went a step further to club India with Israel as the biggest terrorist countries on earth! Pakistani leaders, both civilian and military, while making such statements often forget the fact that instead of facilitating a truce these statements further vitiate the environment.

Panamagate

The apex court of Pakistan raised some vital questions regarding the quality of evidence submitted by PTI. The court stated that the 680-page submission had nothing to do with Sharif family's properties in London. The court observed that the newspaper clippings were only good for selling snacks and could not be considered as evidence. The court made its displeasure known to PTI's counsel. The court was also not happy to hear

another explanation from Sharif camp regarding the purchase of London flats. When Sharif family's counsel Mohammad Akram Sheikh submitted Qatari Prince's letter to the court, Justice Asif Saeed Khosa observed that the letter changed Prime Minister's stance on the issue. The court also observed that both the parties were doing their best to ensure that in the end the court formed a commission itself to decide the Panamagate. PTI chief Imran Khan accused Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif of lying before the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

The government, on its part, pushed The Pakistan Commission of Inquiry Bill, 2016 in the National Assembly. However, it failed to get the bill passed because the house lacked required quorum. The bill had provisions to establish a powerful commission to investigate the Panamagate and other issues. However, it wanted to widen the scope and authority of the commission. The opposition boycotted the session over the lack of quorum and the bill could not be passed. Jamaat-e-Islami chief Siraj-ul-Haq accused the government of making attempts to save the Prime Minister. He went on to the extent of claiming that the 24th amendment to the constitution was an attempt to save Nawaz Sharif from the Panama leaks probe. Given the tussle over the issue, there seems to be no end to the Panamagate anytime soon. It would be interesting to see the further developments in this regard.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

The scope area and the total worth of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has been widening ever since the two countries made a formal announcement for the first time. It has become a trend to include many new projects into the orbit of CPEC. Recently, Divisional Superintendent Railways Muhammad Anif Gul made it clear that the new railway track from Spanzan to Kuchlak would be part of the CPEC and five railway stations of Balochistan would also be upgraded. Members of both civilian and military establishment, who dominated the power centre, seem to be obsessed about the project and its success. It has become a routine for the leaders to issue the statements that the CPEC would transform Pakistani economy and Pakistanis would benefit out of it. Balochistan Chief Minister Sanaullah Zehri's remark that CPEC would promote social contacts in the province is totally in sync with the claims made by federal government.

This is done despite the fact people of the smaller provinces regularly raise the issue of their due share in the project. Khyber Pukhtunkhwa and Balochistan are the case in point. However, other areas too occasionally voice their demands. Recently “Azad Kashmir” government demanded a fair and reasonable share in the ongoing project.

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