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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

The blame-game over the ceasefire violations at the LoC and international border has been continuing making it further difficult to reduce the tension between the two nuclear armed neighbours. Amid reports of heavy exchange of fire between the two armed forces and attempts by terror outfits to infiltrate into the state of Jammu and Kashmir, Pakistan leveled allegations against eight High Commission officials of the Indian High Commission to be RAW and IB agents. Three of the eight named officials came back to India soon after the allegations were made. Following this, the PTI legislator Nabila Hakim Ali filed a resolution in the Punjab Assembly demanding the rechecking of the backgrounds of the foreign diplomats posted in Pakistan.

Pakistan has long been accusing India of interfering in the internal affairs of Pakistan. However, till date it has not been able to provide any conclusive evidence in this regard. Allegations of such serious nature, without any conclusive evidence, not only complicate the already tensed relations but make it more difficult to take steps to normalise the relationship. Instead of making false claim and resorting to negative propaganda, Pakistan should focus on addressing some of the genuine concerns of India affecting the peace and stability of the region.

Panamagate

The tussle between the government and opposition over the Panama Paper Leaks was inevitably moving in a direction where the possibility of any deal or compromise might become a remote possibility. The PTI had given a call to lockdown the Islamabad on November 2, and the ruling dispensation was preparing itself to deal with the situation. Given the prevailing deadlock over the issue, the apex court of Pakistan has shown some interest and willingness to take up the issue. The Supreme Court has ordered PTI and PML-N to submit Terms of References (ToRs) on the formation of a commission to probe revelations made in the Panama Papers. The intervention has avoided an obvious

clash and PTI chairman singlehandedly decided to replace his lockdown plan with a thanksgiving rally at the parade ground in Islamabad. Other parties that had agreed to be part of the Islamabad lockdown criticised Imran Khan for taking the decision without consulting them. Some sections of the PTI workers too were not happy with the decision of calling off the lockdown. However, PTI leadership ignored the concerns of the allies and said that the party believed in solo fight. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif expressed his satisfaction over the court's order and stated that those pointing fingers at him would soon be embarrassed.

Supreme Court's recent order emboldened Imran Khan who started interpreting it as a victory against the Prime Minister. The ruling dispensation interpreted the order differently and accused Imran Khan of twisting the facts and outcome of the Supreme Court hearing. The main opposition party PPP did not seem to be satisfied with the current order of the Supreme Court as the leader of opposition in the Senate Aitzaz Ahsan opposed the formation of an inquiry commission by the apex court. Instead, he asked the judges to decide the case by themselves on the basis of the TOR contained in the bill submitted by the opposition in the parliament. Amid the tug of war over the issue, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his daughter Maryam Nawaz submitted documentary evidence regarding their assets before the apex court. The other children could not submit the detail in time over which the Chief Justice expressed his disappointment. With the passage of time the controversy over the Panamagate is getting more and more complicated. Although the judiciary has shown some interest in the matter, any meaningful progress is yet to be seen.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

Pakistan's obsession with the CPEC is growing day by day. Despite the reservations from the smaller provinces, especially the people of Balochistan and Khyber Pukhtunkhwa, the ruling elite continue to propagate it as a one shot solution to all economic and developmental problems faced by the country. The KP provincial government has actually decided to approach the court against the federal government's discriminatory attitude towards the province. Mushtaq Ghani, the special assistant to the chief minister on information, categorically stated about the plan to move to court against the center for

ignoring the province as far as CPEC was concerned. The civilian and security establishment together have been carefully crafting a new economic narrative around the CPEC which on the one hand projects a bright future for the people of Pakistan and on the other hand blames outside powers, especially India and to some extent Afghanistan, for exploiting the prevailing situation to sabotage the CPEC and related projects. Recently, ISI recommended to the National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) to black the national identity card of a UK based Kashmiri politician called Shabbir Choudhry. The agency suspects that the leader is working with RAW to sabotage the CPEC.

Civil-Military Relations

The nature of civil military relations and security establishment's preponderance in Pakistan is an open secret. Every single development, big or small, in this context is taken seriously at home and abroad. The incumbent army chief is retiring at the end of November and that has given rise to many speculations. If various opinion polls is to be believed, the outgoing Army Chief Gen. Raheel Sharif is more popular than the Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. There were posters, banners and bill-boards requesting him to stay on, soon after he announced that he had no intention to take an extension and would retire at the end of his tenure in November.

Recently, some Pro-COAS posters appeared again in Rawalpindi. However, the message and request this time was different from the earlier ones. This time a hitherto unknown organisation Awami Monitoring Cell asked parliamentarians to reduce the two-year bar on a government servant to take part in politics after retirement. Those behind this move want a reduction in the two-year bar so that it could pave the way for Gen. Raheel Sharif to take part in the next general elections scheduled to be held in 2018. Like the earlier occasion, neither the army chief nor the media wing of the military gave any indication of support to the organisation behind these posters.
