

India and South Asia Report Security and Political Assessment

Pakistan – Government forced to act after Islamic charity placed on U.N. blacklist



The Pakistani government bowed to international pressure and ordered the arrest of the reputed head of Islamic charity Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) last Friday after the United Nations declared the group a front for Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) – the militant outfit blamed for last month’s Mumbai terror attacks.

JuD’s firebrand leader Hafiz Muhammad Saeed and eight other group members were placed under house arrest and 65 JuD offices were reportedly closed down by police.

Assets of both the charity and the nine detainees were also frozen.

The arrests came a day after a U.N. Security Council panel - at the insistence of both India and the United States - placed JuD on a terror blacklist and announced the group would be subject to U.N. sanctions, including an asset freeze, travel ban and arms embargo. It also approved the designation of four suspected plotters of the Mumbai attacks as terrorists subject to sanctions.

The move is the latest attempt by Pakistan to appease Indian demands to crack down on militant Islamic groups and hunt down extremists blamed for last month's assault on Mumbai. Last week troops raided at least six militant sites after Indian authorities released the names and aliases of the nine gunmen killed in the attacks, as well as the districts and towns in Pakistan where they lived. More than 20 suspects were reportedly detained during the raids, including LeT’s operations chief and alleged mastermind of the Mumbai attacks Zaki ur-Rehman Lakhvi, who was arrested on December 7, and Maulana Masood Azhar, head of Islamic extremist group Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM – Army of the Prophet).

India responded by issuing Islamabad with a list of 40 suspects it wants extradited to face terrorism charges - double the number it has previously requested. Pakistan has so far refused to extradite any of the suspects currently being detained and stated that it intends to try them on its own soil because India has not provided any evidence linking them to the attacks.

While India is likely to continue to press Islamabad to hand over the terror suspects, Zardari’s weak civilian government is unlikely to yield to the demand knowing it would provoke a fierce backlash from both the Pakistani public and the powerful Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) agency.

Tensions escalated briefly last Saturday when Pakistan’s air force claimed that two Indian fighter jets had violated Pakistani airspace and flew over the Pakistani-administered part of Kashmir and the eastern city of Lahore – two locations where the LeT is known to be active. Indian authorities played down the accusation, insisting the incident was merely a “technical incursion”.

Meanwhile British Prime Minister Gordon Brown met with Indian premier Manmohan Singh and Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari during a two-day tour of the region last week in a bid to defuse tensions. During the visit Mr. Brown unveiled a £6-million (USD 8.9-million) "pact against terror" with Pakistan, which would provide funding for anti-car bomb equipment and material to educate people out of becoming extremists.

While Pakistan appears to be taking steps to crackdown on militant groups operating in the country, its leaders are well aware that a genuine attempt to dismantle the LeT would be politically dangerous because of the group's leading role in the dispute with India over Kashmir.

India finds itself in a similar predicament. Although the country is desperate for retribution, it is aware that any attack on Pakistani soil would undoubtedly unite various factions in Pakistan and almost certainly lead to further terror attacks on Indian targets.

Nepal – Maoist PM threatens to quit government

Nepal's Maoist Prime Minister Prachanda last week threatened to resign and pull his party out of the coalition government unless the main opposition agreed to cooperate more in political affairs.

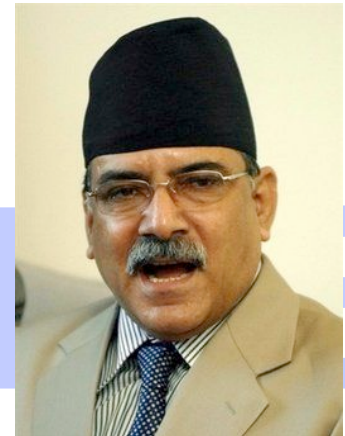
The Maoist leader accused the main opposition Nepali Congress party of refusing to help the government to the point of "rendering it pointless" and blocking his party's ambitious land reform program. He also blamed "some foreign elements" for the lack of progress his government has made.

The Maoists swept to power in landmark elections last April after 10 years of insurrection in the country vowing to push through sweeping land reforms and finalize the peace process by having their former rebel fighters - currently confined to United Nations-monitored camps - integrated into the national army.

However, after well over 100 days in office, they have so far failed to deliver on any of the promises that secured their victory. They have yet to set up a commission on land reform and have been unable to persuade the army - a bastion of Nepal's former ruling elite - to open its ranks to thousands of highly indoctrinated former rebels. The party has also done nothing to stop numerous industrial stoppages caused by pro-Maoist trade unions and their feared youth wing has engaged in sometimes deadly turf wars with that of their main coalition partner.

The souring of relations between the two key coalition parties portends a worsening political deadlock, which could deal a decisive blow to the country's embattled peace process.

The Maoist government's inability to make any tangible progress may also cause the millions who voted the party into power last April to start wondering whether the ex-rebels know what to do with the reins of government.



Assam – Fears mount as bird flu spreads



The Indian Health Ministry sounded a maximum health alert in northeastern state of Assam last week following reports that the bird flu virus was spreading to new areas.

Strains of the deadly H5N1 avian influenza virus have been detected in six of the 27 districts in Assam in the past two weeks, resulting in the culling of over 200,000 birds. About 100 'Rapid Response Teams' have been dispatched to assist local authorities in the culling operation and maintain strict surveillance on farms

where veterinarians are carrying out checks on poultry. Authorities have also imposed a ban on the sale of poultry and poultry products in most parts of Assam in wake of the outbreak.

There are deep concerns over local authorities' ability to prevent the virus from spreading and ensure that humans are not infected. The World Health Organization (WHO) has expressed concern that the H5N1 strain could mutate into a form easily transmitted between humans and spark a pandemic.

New Delhi – Heavy fog results in widespread flight disruption

There was widespread flight disruption at New Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA) last week after a thick blanket of fog - the first of the winter season - engulfed the capital for two consecutive days causing airlines to reschedule a number of flights.



According to airport authorities, about 20 flights were delayed last Thursday evening after the Runway Visibility Range (RVR) dropped to below 1000 meters – 500 meters under the range required for normal flight operations. About a dozen flights were delayed the following Friday also due to fog.

The problem was exacerbated by the fact that the airport had only two runways in operation - the third runway was closed earlier this year just days after it opened when the instrument landing system ILS collapsed. Airport Authority of India (AAI) officials announced Friday that the third runway was now ready for low-visibility air traffic operations during dense fog conditions following the installation of a new Instrument Landing System (ILS).

Seasonal fog is likely until the end of January during which time flight delays can be expected. PSA clients traveling to or transiting through IGIA are advised to reconfirm flight schedules prior to travel.

Quotes of the week

"We have to galvanize the international community to deal with the epicenter of terrorism, which is located in Pakistan."

--**Comments made by India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh during a recent speech to parliament** in which he demanded Pakistan crack down on militant groups allegedly operating on its soil.

"We do not want to impose war, but we are fully prepared in case war is imposed on us."

--**Pakistan's foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi shows no sign of backing down** following rumors India was preparing to launch aerial strikes against militant targets located inside Pakistani territory.

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