

International

India and Pakistan nuclear war could kill 100 million

Renewed tensions between two South Asian rivals

WASHINGTON: The year is 2025 and militants have attacked India's parliament, killing most of its leaders. New Delhi retaliates by sending tanks into the part of Kashmir controlled by Pakistan. Fearing it will be overrun, Islamabad hits the invading forces with its battlefield nuclear weapons, triggering the deadliest conflict in history—and catastrophic global cooling, with temperatures not seen since the last Ice Age.

This scenario was modeled by researchers in a new paper published on Wednesday, which envisaged more than 100 million immediate deaths, followed by global mass starvation after megatons of thick black soot block out sunlight for up to a decade. It comes at a time of renewed tensions between the two South Asian rivals, which have fought several wars over the Muslim-majority territory of Kashmir and are rapidly building up their atomic arsenals. They currently each have about 150 nuclear warheads at their disposal, with the number expected to climb to more than 200 by 2025.

"Unfortunately it's timely because India and Pakistan remain in conflict over Kashmir, and

every month or so you can read about people dying along the border," Alan Robock, a professor in environmental sciences at Rutgers University, who co-authored the paper in *Science Advances* said. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi scrapped the autonomy of the part of Kashmir controlled by New Delhi in August, with his Pakistani counterpart Imran Khan warning the United Nations last week the dispute could escalate into nuclear war.

The two countries last fought a border conflict in February, but they pulled back from the brink after Pakistan returned a downed pilot to India. India has a "no first strike" policy, but reserves the right to mount a nuclear response to any hit by weapons of mass destruction. Pakistan has declared it would only use nuclear weapons if it could not stop an invasion by conventional means or were attacked first with nuclear weapons. The authors wrote that although their scenario had Pakistan pulling the trigger first, they did not mean to imply they believed this was more likely.

Based on their current populations and the

urban centers that would be likely targeted, the researchers estimated up to 125 million could be killed if both countries expended the bulk of their highest yield weapons. Around 75-80 million people were killed in World War II. This most extreme scenario would involve the use of 100 kiloton weapons, more than six times as powerful as the bombs dropped on Hiroshima. A single airburst from such a bomb could kill two million people and injure 1.5 million—but most of the deaths would occur from the raging firestorms that followed the blast.

"India would suffer two to three times more fatalities and casualties than Pakistan because, in our scenario, Pakistan uses more weapons than India and because India has a much larger population and more densely populated cities," the paper said. As a percentage of its urban population, though, Pakistan's losses would be about twice those of India. But nuclear Armageddon would be only the beginning. The research found that the firestorms could release 16 million to 36 million tons of soot (black carbon) into the upper atmosphere, spreading around

the world within weeks.

The soot in turn would absorb solar radiation, heating the air up and boosting the smoke's rise. Sunlight reaching the Earth would decline 20 to 35 percent, cooling the surface by 3.6 to 9 degrees Fahrenheit and reducing precipitation by 15 to 30 percent. Worldwide food shortages would follow, with the effects persisting up to 10 years. "I hope our work will make people realize you can't use nuclear weapons, they are weapons of mass genocide," Robock told AFP, adding the paper lent more evidence to support the 2017 UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.

Johann Chacko, a columnist for Quartz India and doctoral student at SOAS in London, said the work "helps the global community evaluate the cost of nuclear war for everyone, not just the combatant nations," particularly its climatic impacts. But, he added: "There's very little in the history of Indo-Pakistan kinetic conflict to suggest that leadership on either side would continue escalating until they annihilated the other."—AFP

Kashmiri journalists stage protest against 'media gag'

SRINAGAR: Journalists in Indian Kashmir yesterday staged a small silent protest against what they say has been a "media gag" by Indian authorities that has badly affected their ability to work in the disputed region for the last 60 days. India stripped its portion of Muslim-majority Kashmir of autonomy on Aug. 5, shutting off phone networks and imposing curfew-like restrictions in some areas to dampen discontent.

Some of those curbs have been slowly relaxed, but mobile and internet communications in the Kashmir valley are largely still blocked, severely impacting the ability of journalists to report from the region. Carrying placards and wearing black badges, more than 100 Kashmiri journalists gathered inside the Kashmir Press Club premises in Srinagar to stage a protest, as street protests are still restricted. "End information clampdown", "Stop criminalizing journalists", "Journalism is not a crime", read placards held up during the silent protest.

The Indian government has provided an internet connection at a media centre set up for journalists, but reporters say this is insufficient and it lacks privacy. "There's no privacy. Some 300 journalists use that facility daily and it is crowded. It is also being monitored and we are under surveillance," said Ishfaq Tantray, general secretary of the Kashmir Press Club. A government spokesman in Kashmir was not immediately reachable for comment.

The president of the Kashmir Press Club, Shuja Thakur said that they had several times approached the Indian government in Kashmir for restoration of mobile and internet services for journalists. "They keep promising and say they are looking into it, but so far there has been no ac-



KASHMIR: Journalists hold signs during a protest against the ongoing restrictions of the Internet and mobile phone networks at the Kashmir Press Club during a lockdown in Srinagar on yesterday. —AFP

tion," he said. New Delhi said the scrapping of Jammu and Kashmir state's special status was necessary to integrate it fully into the rest of India and spur development. Kashmir is divided between India and Pakistan, who both claim the territory in full. More than 40,000 people have been killed in an insurgency in the Indian part of Kashmir since 1989.

Separately yesterday, local media reported that opposition leaders in Jammu - where restrictions have already been eased to a greater extent - were after almost two months allowed to move out of their homes on Wednesday and resume their political activities. The lifting of restrictions on movement of around a dozen top opposition leaders in Jammu comes ahead of local council elections in the state that are scheduled for Oct 24, the Indian Express reported. — Reuters

Hugs and smiles as Taliban meets Pakistani officials

ISLAMABAD: A group of senior Taliban were warmly welcomed by Pakistani officials as they arrived in Islamabad yesterday, where the foreign minister called for a resumption of talks with the US on the war in Afghanistan. Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Taliban's co-founder who spent eight years in a Pakistani prison, was greeted with hugs and smiles by Pakistan's foreign minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi and spy chief Lieutenant General Faiz Hameed, footage released by the ministry showed.

Pakistan was one of only three countries to recognize the Taliban regime and its shadowy military establishment, particularly the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) which Hameed heads, and is widely believed to back the bloody insurgency in Afghanistan. Islamabad denies the accusation.

Pakistan has helped facilitate talks between the Taliban and Washington in Qatar over the past year, seeking an agreement to pave the way for a US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan in return for various security promises from the insurgents. The two sides were on the brink of a deal - with an announcement widely expected to be imminent - when US President Donald Trump abruptly declared the process "dead" last month, citing Taliban violence.

The Taliban threatened more attacks, but both the insurgents and the US left the door open for negotiations to resume - with most experts agreeing Washington will have to return to the table eventually. Islamabad wants the talks to resume "to smooth the path for a durable, long-lasting peace and stability in Afghanistan", Qureshi was quoted as saying in the statement. "War is not a solution to any problem. Talks are the only and positive solution to establish peace in Afghanistan," he continued.

The Taliban said that, along with the peace process, they had also discussed bilateral ties, politics, "education, health, travel and visa related issues to Afghan refugees in Pakistan". For decades, Pakistan has hosted refugees fleeing fighting in Afghanistan, including the Taliban insurgency.—AFP