

India-Pakistan tension at a new peak

Susan Maitra reports from New Delhi on the background to the current upheavals in both countries and strains between them.

India-Pakistan talks to improve bilateral relations held increasing promise over the past two years. Now they lie in shambles. Accusations and counter-accusations hurled by the leaders of both nations have brought the subcontinent to the boiling point. Assessments are that the latest crises could soon lead to an all-out war between the two countries. Sources here say that, although both sides have many reasons to prevent such a development, it cannot be ruled out.

Over a period of less than 12 months, a number of events have precipitated the deterioration of bilateral relations. Some of these events, insofar as they reflect difficult internal problems in India or Pakistan, are simply a pretext for blaming each other: for example, the so-called democratic uprising in the Pakistani province of Sind last year against the regime of Zia ul-Haq.

Secessionist threats

It is a fact that the Pakistani people in general strongly resent the dictatorial tenets of the present regime. But the elements within Sind province who led the movement neither represented the entire population, nor were they seriously interested in Pakistan's well-being as a nation. It was a spontaneous and significant popular outburst against the all-powerful military dictatorship which finally ended up in the control of a few outright secessionist leaders and a handful of feudal landlords; the latter have since compromised with the regime.

The Sind movement was ruthlessly suppressed by the Pakistani army in an operation that left many scars, scars that, as the military regime is well aware, may well open and bleed again. In the midst of the mass demonstrations that temporarily crippled Sind, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's rather innocuous remarks supporting the struggle of "democratic forces" around the world drew sharp reactions from the Pakistani military leaders, who seized the opportunity of this remark to thump on the anti-India drum.

This is possible because India and Pakistan, in their 37 years of cohabitation following the bloody partition of the subcontinent, have fought three bitter wars, and some Pakistani generals still blame India for the foundation of Bangladesh—formerly East Pakistan—in 1971. The military regime's ploy in taking exception to the Indian Premier's re-

marks was to rally the people, particularly those of Punjab, to support ruthless suppression of the anti-administration movement in Sind.

India, Pakistani government spokesmen charged, was interfering in Pakistan's internal affairs.

Sikh agitation in Punjab

But well before the Sind movement emerged, things had started to sour between the two nations. In the Indian state of Punjab, extremist Sikh groups had begun a terrorist movement aimed at setting up an independent Sikh state, "Khalistan," bordering Pakistan. For over four years now, moderate Sikh leaders have been locked in negotiations with New Delhi for solutions to various issues which would give Punjab greater prominence and the Sikh community a greater identity. Playing on sensation, the extremists thoroughly infiltrated the moderate Sikh leadership, gained virtual control of it, and began to terrorize the population. Intelligence reports indicate clearly that these "Khalistanis" are being funded from abroad from such sources as Libya, Great Britain, Canada, and the United States. Much of this funding comes through private organizations with tacit government approval.

Although the Khalistanis consistently deny receiving material support from Pakistan, Indian newspapers have quoted reliable sources suggesting exactly that. Moreover, it is rather widely known in Punjab that large shipments of arms and opium are being smuggled across the border from Pakistan by the Sikh extremists.

But since the Indian government has not yet provided sufficient evidence to implicate Pakistan in this matter, the Pakistani press, which is tightly controlled by the military regime, has routinely played up any outbreak of violence in Punjab and pointedly refrained from condemning it. It would be correct to assume, and every Indian readily does so, that Pakistan is enjoying every bit of discomfiture the Punjab chaos is causing for India and is rooting for the troublemakers.

Indian leaders, cabinet ministers included, have complained about Pakistan's "involvement" and are "convinced" that the present Pakistani leaders, their gestures of a "no-war pact" with India notwithstanding, are not at all interested in peace and territorial integrity in India. For its part, the Indian press lost no chance to laud the Sind movement, even when

the evidence of its rank secessionist character was overwhelming.

Kashmir separatists wage terror

The flareup in a particularly ugly fashion of the decades-old, but still unresolved, Kashmir issue recently gave more focus to the tension. The subject of Kashmir evokes inordinate passion among the populations of both nations. One of the independent princely states that was to choose its allegiance following partition, Kashmir was invaded and partially occupied by "a tribe" from Pakistan in 1947 before the decision was taken, and a stalemate ensued.

In 1971 a terrorist group, the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), hijacked an Indian Airlines plane to Pakistan, and since then has conducted various anti-India activities from its base in Pakistan. The issue caught international attention last February when JKLF members kidnapped an Indian diplomat in Birmingham, England, and left his dead body in the driveway of a country farmhouse. The kidnapping was followed by demands for ransom and release of their colleagues languishing in Indian jails. The insane act was accurately viewed in India as a deliberate move to heighten tension in the subcontinent. Rajiv Gandhi, a member of Parliament and general secretary of the ruling Congress-I Party, told the London *Financial Times* that an India-Pakistan war would probably break out within the year.

On the kidnapping and subsequent murder of the Indian diplomat, President Zia ul-Haq has expressed grief publicly, but extensive reports published in the Indian press and the Western press show that the JKLF members who carried out the crime are sitting in Pakistani-held Kashmir, after safe passage from London, and are allowed to keep up liaison work with their bases in the United Kingdom, West Germany, and elsewhere.

Two incidents this year have created further fallout. Recently newspaper reports confirmed that a coup to oust the present military regime of President Zia had been aborted in January. Although coup attempts against military rulers are not uncommon in Pakistan, the recent attempt was significant, as it involved some of the top generals who backed Zia's ascent to power in 1977. Apparently shaken by this development, Zia quietly removed two top generals and replaced them with two of his closest associates.

Publicly the Pakistan government accused Indian intelligence of masterminding the aborted coup. The Indian government quickly repudiated the charge, and the *Christian Science Monitor* quoted a U.S. official supporting the Indian denial.

While accusations of interference in internal affairs were hurled back and forth between New Delhi and Islamabad, a leading Pakistani nuclear scientist, Dr. Abdul Qadeer Khan, dropped a bombshell which will have a long-term effect on the two nations' relationship. In an interview to the Urdu daily, *Nawa-e-waqt*, Dr. Khan said that if the government chooses to, Pakistan is now capable of building a nuclear

bomb (see Report from New Delhi, page 41). Good will between the two nations, tenuous as it was, has become the first casualty.

The role of the superpowers and China in this context cannot be ignored. The United States, which has always treated Pakistan as a mercenary vassal state, continues to pour sophisticated arms into the hands of an unstable political leadership. In spite of the fact that in the past year, more and more voices from diverse quarters have been raised against the military regime in Pakistan, U.S. foreign policy has remained unaltered.

Though less hamhanded, the Soviet Union's policy toward the subcontinent has been equally dangerous, if not downright duplicitous. Moscow routinely lambasts the Pakistani regime for not settling the Afghanistan issue to the Soviets' satisfaction, and for buying advanced weaponry from the United States. Now the Soviets are wooing the same "military dictatorship" with economic aid. In fact, Soviet Ambassador V. S. Smirnov told *Nawa-e-waqt* in mid-December that his country dreamed of the establishment of "such brotherly relations between the Soviet Union and Pakistan as may culminate in a treaty of friendship and amity."

While Ambassador Smirnov was waxing eloquent in Islamabad, Soviet Defense Minister Dimitri Ustinov was preparing a trip to New Delhi to sell his military wares, and Moscow publicly expressed its special concern about Indian security in light of the disturbed internal situation in Punjab and Kashmir.

The Soviet Union's duplicity was neither new, nor did it go unnoticed. It has been pointed out in the Indian press that in 1968, only three years after India and Pakistan had fought a war the Soviet Union accused Pakistan of starting, Moscow was busy selling arms to the unstable military regime of the day in Pakistan. Moscow's role was similar as far as Sino-India relations were concerned. Moscow forcefully and routinely warned India of Chinese designs on its territory prior to each series of talks between representatives of India and China. The pitch of these warnings subsided as soon as the Soviet Union started its own talks with China.

Broader geopolitical plots against the subcontinent as a whole are attested to by the fact that while the secessionist Khalistanis and the terrorist JKLF members are both sheltered and funded in London, the same financiers connected with the Nazi-linked Swiss bankers and Islamic fundamentalists are also involved in bankrolling secessionist movements in Pakistan and plotting coups to oust President Zia ul-Haq.

The biggest security problem for both India and Pakistan is the fact that they are developing nations with enormous economic problems. Both have developed scientific and technological capabilities, but to utilize this capability requires political stability and substantial, focused investments in infrastructure, agriculture, and industry. The superpowers and the Anglo-Swiss patricians do not choose to encourage that.