

From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

Campaign for breakup of Pakistan

The Great Game in the Indian subcontinent takes a new and ominous turn.

The April 18 formation of a Sindhi-Baluch-Pushtoon front to fight for the "liberation" of these ethnic minorities from the "Punjabi domination" of the central government of Pakistan, announced in London, ought to have given a jolt to policymakers here interested in stabilizing the region.

The architects of the new front, prominent members of the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), the leading opposition party, argue that since President Zia ul-Haq has in effect nullified the 1973 constitution, they are in their rights to stand on the constitutional legal position of the 1940 Muslim League resolution. That resolution prescribed that the four provinces of Pakistan were to be fully autonomous units with only defense, foreign affairs, currency, and communications handled centrally.

Leaders of the front include Dr. Khalid Laghari, president of the front; Hafeez Pirzada, former cabinet minister in the government of PPP founder Z.A. Bhutto; and Mumtaz Ali Bhutto, cousin of Z.A. Bhutto, and former cabinet minister and governor of Sind. The front also includes Afzal Bangesh, a Pushtoon who is president of the old leftist Worker-Peasant Party of Pakistan, as well as Sardar Ataullah Mengal, former chief minister of Baluchistan and an avowed fighter for total independence for that province.

The move is a frontal attack on Benazir Bhutto, the head of the notoriously faction-ridden PPP, and apparently took place while she was on a visit to the United States. Ms. Bhutto has yet to respond to the new devel-

opment publicly, but reports from London, headquarters of the Pakistani exile community, indicate that she opposes the idea that the PPP represents anything less than the entire nation of Pakistan.

In view of Benazir's silence, another PPP figure has jumped to take the stage. Ghulam Mustafa Khar, a member of the central executive and a former governor of Punjab, called a press conference in London on April 24 to denounce the new front as "the first step towards secession and the breakup of Pakistan." Khar demanded that Ms. Bhutto expel all members having anything to do with the front.

The launch of the front in London was coordinated with a move in the same direction by the erstwhile PPP leadership inside Pakistan. Ghulam Mustafa Jatoi, just released from detention, issued a 14-point demand to the new National Assembly to lift martial law, restore the 1973 constitution, abolish the military courts, release political prisoners, restore freedom of the press, and so on. Unless the demands are fulfilled in 2-3 months, Jatoi stated, he would begin campaigning for fresh elections to form a new assembly that will implement the 1940 Muslim League resolution.

Jatoi will become head of the multiparty opposition coalition, the Movement for Restoration of Democracy (MRD), in July. Jatoi had resisted pressures, since the 1983 rebellion in Sind, his home province, to take the balkanization route. But while in prison in January 1984, Jatoi apparently drafted a manifesto in which he stated

that there was no other way to end "Punjabi domination" but to go for confederation, with the proviso for outright secession should any agency seek to interfere with the sovereignty of the provinces.

Elsewhere on the ground, the secessionist drive is well advanced. Jatoi's move has wide support in the MRD coalition, including from Nawabzada Nasrullah Khan's Pakistan Democratic Party and the Soviet mouthpiece, Khan Abdul Wali Khan, of the Northwest Frontier Province.

In Sind, where the cry for separation first surfaced during the 1983 agitation, in the context of severe reprisals against opposition activists, the "Sind Liberation Army" operates underground. The Sindhi liberation movement has the blessing of G.M. Syed, a proponent of provincial autonomy in the 1940s and more recently author of a book banned in Pakistan, *A Case for the Nation of Sind*.

The recent developments make even more urgent India's efforts to find a rapprochement with Pakistan to stabilize the subcontinent. The surfacing of the secessionist front comes just weeks after Soviet chief Mikhail Gorbachov put the stick to General Zia over Afghanistan, and there is no doubt that the Soviets have been quietly nurturing this move for some time.

Benazir Bhutto's exile from Pakistan in 1983, left the party apparatus predominantly in the hands of old Comintern-linked networks. Her leadership was promptly challenged around the demands for recognition of the Babrak Karmal regime in Afghanistan, among other points, in a series of left factional moves.

Front leaders have stated their impatience with her attempt to find backing for a new PPP-led civilian government in Pakistan from the American Eastern Establishment.