

From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

New moves in an old game

Beneath the more spectacular issues of lifting martial law and the bomb, a separatist game gains momentum in Pakistan.

Nothing, or very little, it seems, changes in the northwestern sector of the Indian subcontinent, the historic arena of British and Russian imperial contests, known as the "Great Game."

If it is difficult to find a rationale for Pakistan's bomb project—it makes no sense from any standpoint of national self-interest—it is just as difficult to find reason in that country's solicitude toward the "Khalistan separatist" operations against India, the more so since there is accumulating evidence that Pakistan itself is being prepared for sacrifice on the same altar of national disintegration.

In the latest developments, the cry has gone up for "provincial autonomy"—the banner of the separatist forces—from within the Pakistani state of Punjab, heretofore the dominant base of the central government. Liberation movements in the other states, Baluchistan, Sindh, and the Northwest Frontier Province, have been established in reaction to "Punjabi domination" of the government.

It is a former Pakistan People's Party (PPP) chief minister of Punjab, Haneef Ramay, who has brought the disintegration game full circle. "We Punjabis shed our blood for the creation and defense of Pakistan," Ramay states in his recently released book, *The Case for Punjab*. "In this connection, we went to such a length, that we lost our identity, ceased to be Punjabis, and accepted Urdu [the national language] as our mother tongue. We are destroying our own culture. On the other hand, people of other provinces hate us. They accuse us of exploiting

their resources, and ruining their cultures and languages. We must reconsider our policies, and the demand for complete internal autonomy for all provinces should be supported."

A fundamentalist socialist—from the beginning of his political career, he sought to use religion to bring about socialism—and close associate of the late President Zulfikar ali Bhutto, Ramay was a founding member of the PPP and served as both finance minister and chief minister of Punjab province during Bhutto's first administration. Ramay's latest move has the backing of another PPP founding member, the ultra-leftist former Pakistani finance minister, Dr. Mubashir Hasan.

Sections of the Pakistani press have sharply attacked Ramay and his call to "forge links with the people of Indian Punjab" in a reincarnation of the empire of Maharajah Ranjid Singh, the 18th-century ruler of undivided Punjab. Ramay is reported to be full of praise for Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, the late terrorist Sant of Khalistan.

"Ramay is no different from Attaullah Mengal and Khair Baksh Marri," the Baluchi separatists "who vehemently opposed the creation of Pakistan, but now claim to be its defenders," the chief editor of the Urdu daily *Nawa-e-Waqt* charged at the ceremony launching Ramay's book. Today, Mengal and Marri operate the Baluchi separatist campaign from self-exile in London and Kabul, respectively.

Mengal figures prominently in the formation of a so-called Sindhi-Bal-

uch-Pushtoon front, announced April 18 in London, to fight for the "liberation" of these ethnic minorities from "Punjabi domination." The separatist front was crafted in part by a Soviet-tied group among the self-exiled PPP bosses, reflecting a factional move against the leadership of Benazir Bhutto. The London move was coordinated with a shift to support of "provincial autonomy" by the erstwhile PPP leadership still inside Pakistan, predominantly linked to old Comintern networks.

Ramay is simply broadening the base for this great game. There are plenty of indications that the British and Russians are joining forces for this particular round.

As the report goes, Attaulla Mengal's son is to wed the daughter of Khair Baksh Marri in New Delhi before the year is out. Uniting the London and Kabul sections of the Baluch tribe will no doubt contribute to operational efficiency. Reportedly, guests from London, Pakistan, and Afghanistan will be joined by guests from the Soviet Union, and Baluch leaders from Pakistan will stay on after the ceremony for a strategy session.

Six months ago, formation of the Sindhi-Baluch-Pushtoon front followed close on the heels of Soviet party head Gorbachov's threats to Gen. Zia ul Haq over Afghanistan. The latest developments coincide with an outburst by Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Kapitsa, in which he openly brandished the separatist stick against Pakistan.

"Your country is at war with the Soviet Union," Kapitsa told the editor of the daily *The Muslim*. "You do not understand the big problem you are in. The three million Afghan refugees in Pakistan are Pathans [the ethnic group of Northwest Frontier Province]. Have you forgotten Abdul Ghaffar and Pushtoonistan?"