

# London 'colonialists' may lose on Kashmir

by Ramtanu Maitra and Susan Maitra

Despite the shrillness of the anti-India campaign in Britain concerning the Kashmir issue, there are reasons to believe that both India and Pakistan are trying to put the brakes on what may otherwise lead to yet another inconclusive war between the two countries over Kashmir.

The Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir has been claimed by both India and Pakistan since 1947, and now Muslim radicals, with backing from London, have fomented an uprising there against the Indian government.

The visit by Pakistani Foreign Secretary Shahryar Khan to New Delhi in August was highlighted by the message he carried from Prime Minister Mian Nawaz Sharif for Indian Premier P. V. Narasimha Rao. According to media sources, the Pakistani prime minister proposed to get rid of stereotyped approaches and instead focus on positive areas of interaction. The message opens a possibility that the Kashmir issue might finally be brought to a peaceful resolution. In an interview with the Dubai-based *Khaleeq Times*, Rao stated that Pakistan is ready to improve relations with India.

However, provocations by a gamut of British Labour Party and a few Conservative Party members of Parliament, led by shadow foreign minister Gerald Kaufman, have been at a fever pitch (see *EIR*, Aug. 23, p. 48).

Along with the "colonialist gang," the U.S.-based Asia Watch, in its May 1991 report "Kashmir Under Siege," equated the Indian government's actions to curb terrorism with the Kashmiri terrorist violence. The U.S. State Department has also been fanning the flames, as was evident in U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Robert Oakley's talk about the likelihood of war. At Oakley's recent farewell party in Islamabad, former Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto presented him with a Chinese vase, reminding him that the land contact between Pakistan and China would be disrupted if Kashmir were allowed to become an independent state, as the British campaign implies.

## Mixed signals

However, Pakistan's signals have been inconsistent. Prime Minister Sharif, while addressing a rally at Neelabur in the Pakistani-held part of Kashmir, said Pakistan would continue to extend "full moral and political support" to the secessionists in Jammu and Kashmir. Earlier, in an interview with *Newsweek*, Sharif had said Kashmir was increasing tensions between the two countries and could cause a war.

But briefing newsmen on return from Delhi, Shahryar Khan said he had been able to assuage misgivings created by the *Newsweek* interview. The message he carried from Sharif to Rao, Khan confirmed, was a proposal to open a "new chapter" in Indo-Pakistani relations in which all issues would be addressed. Khan said he had received a positive response, adding: "I did not see a monsoon or war clouds during my stay in the Indian capital."

According to Delhi media, though still aiding and abetting secessionism in the Indian part of Kashmir, Pakistan is trying to play down its role in the harsh anti-India resolutions on Kashmir passed early in August by the Organization of Islamic Conference.

The Pakistani delegation also reportedly said that Pakistan will not rake up the Kashmir issue at the United Nations General Assembly in September. This is a promise which, if lived up to, will draw genuine gratitude from India and change the geometry between the two countries.

## Washington's maneuvers

According to Indian analysts, Islamabad's change of heart results from pressure from Washington. M.K. Kothari, writing in Delhi's *Economic Times*, says that with the retirement of Gen. Aslam Beg and the accession of Gen. Asif Nawaz Janjua as the chief of the Armed Forces, the Bush administration has control over all three power apexes of Pakistan—President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, Prime Minister Sharif, and General Janjua. The United States is eager to deliver financial and military assistance to Pakistan, but has been blocked by the Pressler Amendment, which calls for presidential certification that Pakistan is not developing nuclear weapons.

Washington will help India out with its Kashmiri thorn, by forcing Pakistan to resort to bilateral talks on the conflict within the bounds of the 1972 Shimla Accord signed by Mrs. Indira Gandhi and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. In return, India will have to agree to the Pakistani prime minister's proposal for a five-nation discussion on a Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone in South Asia. Apparently Washington believes that initiation of such a discussion will allow the U.S. Congress to circumvent the Pressler Amendment and restore U.S. aid.

In light of its political weakness, it remains to be seen whether Islamabad can carry out a policy that might lead to compromise on the Kashmir conflict. But Kothari says Pakistani officials have privately said that once General Janjua gains control of Inter-Services Intelligence, Pakistan's all-powerful military intelligence unit, which has been accused of funneling money and arms to the Afghan mujahideen as well as the Kashmiri and Punjabi separatists, Pakistan could stop material assistance to the Kashmiri militants.

Kothari's argument was given credence by the visit to India of U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Thomas Pickering. On Aug. 26, Pickering told Indian press that the U.S. prefers a bilateral settlement on Kashmir to a U.N. settlement.