

Pakistan's efforts to beat up on India fail

by Susan Maitra

The last-minute withdrawal of the four-point resolution, accusing India of human rights violations in Jammu and Kashmir, introduced on Feb. 25 before the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR), on March 9, after deferring the voting process for three hours, is widely considered a slap in the face for the Bhutto government in Islamabad.

The resolution, which Pakistan had introduced, contained, among other charges, its demand that a U.N. mission be sent to Kashmir to make a field evaluation of the situation there. As it became evident to Pakistan that the resolution had few takers, Islamabad diluted the resolution by eliminating its demand for the U.N. mission. But the Indian diplomatic offensive, a cool response from the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), an American whisper campaign to other nations to abstain from voting, and active efforts by China and Iran to quash the resolution were too much for Islamabad to buck. Giving up the resolution minutes before it was scheduled to be presented for a vote, Pakistani Foreign Minister Sardar Assef Ahmed Ali told newsmen that with the advice of Pakistan's best friends, China and Iran, in mind, Islamabad had agreed to withdraw the resolution and give India "another chance" to improve its human rights record in Kashmir.

A day later, however, Pakistan changed its tune. Citing a British Broadcasting Corp. report, Foreign Minister Sardar Assef Ahmed claimed that India had indeed agreed to allow an OIC team to go to Kashmir on a fact-finding mission as a condition, and on this basis the resolution had been withdrawn. Indian Foreign Secretary K. Srinivasan denied that any such deal had been agreed to and called the assertion a lie. Subsequently, Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto has threatened to bring up the Kashmir issue before the U.N. Security Council in retaliation for the renegeing on the alleged deal by the government of Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao.

The U.S. role

Empty rhetoric and swallowing of hurt pride aside, the intensity of lobbying and posturing that followed the affair has itself no doubt worsened bilateral relations between the two countries. Firstly, it was incomprehensible to anyone why Pakistan, which is widely known to be running terrorist

camps along the line of control aimed at the Indian part of Kashmir, and has also been accused of widespread human rights violations inside Pakistan by the self-appointed guardians of human rights, would bring such a resolution to the U.N. in Geneva unless the United States was behind it. But soon enough, it became clear that Washington was distancing itself from the resolution in a sneaky way by planning to abstain from voting. This tactic of Washington pleased neither the Indians, who demanded that the United States must oppose a resolution on human rights violations pushed by a nation which sponsors international terrorism, nor the Pakistanis, who found out that Washington not only left them in the lurch but was quietly telling other nations to abstain from voting, too.

Secondly, Pakistan went to the UNCHR with much fanfare just after holding a round of talks at the foreign secretary level to resolve various bilateral issues, including the dispute concerning Kashmir. Although that round of talks in early January did not break any ice, it was assumed that the talks would be resumed and that there was a mutual understanding that bilateral talks is the only way to resolve the various disputes. The subsequent antics by Prime Minister Bhutto and her government officials made it evident that the shots were being called from outside, and that she was going along for her own survival.

Indian position hardens

As a response to the Pakistani-tabled resolution, the Rao government of India hardened its position and passed a unanimous resolution in the Indian Parliament which categorically said that Kashmir is an integral part of India. The tone of the resolution and the manner in which it was passed clearly told Pakistan that the time to talk was over. At the highest level in Pakistan, one senior correspondent from Karachi noted recently, the Indian parliamentary resolution had conveyed the message: prepare for a war. Even if that is true, neither Pakistan nor India gave any signal to that effect and instead plunged into high-pitch lobbying.

In this milieu, two things worked for India. First, a meeting between the foreign ministers of India, Iran, and China in Teheran in early March set the stage for a full-court press on Pakistan. This became all too obvious in Geneva when the Iranian delegation had practically given an ultimatum to the Pakistanis by asking Islamabad to withdraw the resolution or face its defeat on the floor. China had already conveyed to Pakistan that Beijing considered such a resolution at the UNCHR, to browbeat another nation for human rights violations, as wholly unacceptable. It is obvious that both China and Iran feared that a similar resolution could be brought against them, and that Washington might use that route in due time. Pakistan also saw that the votes were simply not there, and that all the major nations were either against it or had walked away with the ladder after placing Islamabad on the roof-top.