

India battles religious fundamentalism

Paul Zykofsky reports from Delhi on the Ramadan provocateurs and the government response.

Sixty million Muslims living in India yearly observe the Eid holy day marking the end of the Ramadan fast. For more than 30 years, India's national press has been able to carry the headline: "Peaceful Eid Celebrations Throughout India." The widespread Hindu-Muslim riots triggered on the occasion had for the most part come to an end after India's independence from the British Empire in 1947.

This year, when the Eid celebrations coincided with Independence Day for the first time in 11 years, the peace was shattered on Aug. 13 by well-planned provocations. For 13 days the riots raged and spread, claiming scores of lives and creating bitterness throughout the main cities of northern India.

Imposition of tight curfews, uncovering of arms caches, and arrests of provocateurs, all conducted in rapid deployment by security forces, have brought the situation under control. Troubling questions about the origins and causes of the riots persist. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi gave an inkling of her suspicions in the course of her Aug. 15 Independence Day address. She warned that "There are some sections, though small in number, who seem to be working against the nation's interest as part of a deep-rooted conspiracy."

Since Mrs. Gandhi's speech, a judicial inquiry has been set up to examine the riots. Analysts in New Delhi expect firm action once the findings are complete.

The outside elements

Over the past few months, Mrs. Gandhi has increasingly referred to the "dangers" which have emerged "all around India from the sea as well as from the land." The Carter administration's covert military arrangements with China, the furor over Soviet presence in Afghanistan, and the subsequent effort to "strengthen" an extremely unpopular General Ziaul Haq in Pakistan caused concern. Now the anti-Indian polemics in the region are being escalated by prodding Bangladesh President Gen. Ziaur Rahman to make his voice heard as well. The Bangladesh President has Chinese

backing. Across the Indian Ocean arc, India has suddenly become an isolated case of stability.

In this regional context, Mrs. Gandhi has been warning for some months that extremist elements in India's northeastern areas have created the precedent for communal strife throughout the country. Since late 1979, the state of Assam has been virtually paralyzed by a student movement demanding the expulsion of non-Assamese from the state.

Trends came together in the August Muslim riots. The first riot was sparked by the entry of a pig, the animal Muslims regard as unclean, into the prayer ground. The result was a confrontation between Muslim worshippers and police, with rumors that spread into numerous other major cities such as Agra, Lucknow, Allahabad, and even the old city of Delhi.

At Moradabad, the epicenter of the riots and now the center of the judicial inquiry, several factors point toward a preconceived strategy:

- A group of people among the attendants at the prayers were armed with knives, daggers and even firearms even though nothing had recently happened in the city to create a sense of insecurity;
- The presence of a large number of firearms, and the town's geographical location, would ensure that the rumors would be heard all over India;
- Numerous snipers played a role;
- Arms with foreign markings were found, particularly Chinese-made rifles smuggled into India.

Made in Iran

These factors led one district magistrate to conclude in one affected city that there was "some mastermind behind an organized and planned conspiracy to create trouble in the city." While bigger play has been given to the Moradabad incident, some observers feel that the government is more concerned about the developments in Kashmir, the state with a large Muslim population bordering Pakistan and China. Here, two months ago, a traveler returning from the area commented that huge

amounts of Libyan money were pouring in. Shortly thereafter the student wing of the Muslim fundamentalist organization, the Jamaati Islami announced that a World Islamic Conference would be held in Kashmir. The youth wing also pledged itself to "Iran-style" revolution in Kashmir to gain "independence." That conference was subsequently banned by the state government.

The Jamaati in Kashmir has strong links with the Pakistani Jamaati, the subcontinental arm of the Muslim Brotherhood and the mainstay of General Ziaul Haq's junta in Pakistan. One knowledgeable Islamic analyst in India has uncovered evidence that implicates not only the Jamaati in fomenting riots but the little-known Muslim secret society, the Tablighi Jamaat. The Tablighi is generally associated with educational activities but is known to be a revivalist trend within Muslim movements. It operates in utter secrecy. One authoritative source on the subject comments: "It is the only organization capable of creating the kind of communal frenzy in which sanity yields place to the irrationalism and madness so necessary for creating destabilizations, by engineering the type of situation in which the Moradabad rioting took place."

Pakistan involved?

There are many curious incidents in the aftermath of the rioting that have fueled suspicion about General Ziaul Haq's involvement.

Shortly after the first communal outbreak on Aug. 13, the Pakistani foreign ministry called in its ambassador from New Delhi to discuss the situation in India, and expressed "serious concern" for the "lives and property of the minority Muslim population." The foreign ministry statement followed widespread attacks on India by Pakistan's government-controlled press. While the police have interrogated Pakistani nationals on involvement in the rioting and its preparations, the *Times of India* put out one plausible analysis of the situation: "Plainly General Ziaul Haq . . . is whipping up anti-India sentiment at home to divert popular attention from his internal troubles, but this is only part of the story."

While Pakistan claims it wants to improve relations with India—and there are recent reports that General Zia is eager to visit New Delhi—evidence continues to accumulate that Zia is involved in an operation to destabilize Mrs. Gandhi's government. Observers quickly point out that Zia abstained from expressing his "serious concern" after worse communal riots began in two major cities in 1978, when the Janata government was in power. Some attribute that silence to a covert agreement between Zia and the Hindu chauvinist RSS elements in the then-ruling Janata Party. Now there is

little love lost between the secular-minded Gandhi government and Gen. Zia.

Reports in the Indian press that General Zia is considering establishing a "people's army" along the lines of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) is another cause for concern in India. The *Times of India* charged Aug. 21 that: "what he is planning is a straightforward expansion of the armed forces and its requirement in weapons." Rumors that 10,000 Pakistani soldiers will be stationed in Saudi Arabia for a payment of \$1 billion are viewed as part of this package. That money would be recycled into Zia's militarization schemes and directed, as in the past, against India, according to Indian defense analysts.

The new buildup is to attain the long-sought "parity" with India's armed forces. Zia's claim that the buildup is to face the Soviet threat in Afghanistan is dismissed by recalling Zia's own repeated comment that he has no intention of taking on the Red Army. According to Zia a few months before, Pakistan "having been compelled to live in the sea, must learn to live with the whales." ■

Mrs. Gandhi comments on the August riots

Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi has charged that Pakistan's policy is "interference in India's internal affairs." Mrs. Gandhi, speaking Aug. 30 on the occasion of Japan's Foreign Minister Masayoshi Ito's visit to India, attacked what she referred to as "a deep-layered conspiracy to undermine the stability of the nation and government and to create division."

Mrs. Gandhi strongly denied the Pakistani analysis that the hostilities took place in India because of the "communal tension existing between the Hindus and Moslems." She asserted that the purpose behind the violence is to destabilize the government and that explains why so many assaults were carried out against the police.

While Mrs. Gandhi was warning Pakistan against instigating violence, Chief Minister of Kashmir Sheikh Abdullah denounced Pakistan and unnamed West Asian countries for interference in the Indian part of Kashmir. Abdullah charged that foreign money is flowing into Kashmir not for "religious purposes" but to create agitation and