

From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

The Qaddafi connection

An investigation of the Libyan dictator's role in Gandhi's assassination would at least overturn many outworn assumptions.

Whether or not Libya's Colonel Qaddafi had a hand in the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi, as Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak warned may have been the case in a Nov. 18 press conference in Cairo, is yet to be ascertained.

While the Indian government has maintained an official "no comment" on the Mubarak allegation, the fact that heads of state do not speak out lightly on such matters was no doubt appreciated here. In an investigation in which authorities have promised to leave no stone unturned, the Libyan lead will certainly receive due consideration. As one Indian correspondent in London noted, for example, a publication put out by self-styled Pakistani exiles who call themselves "anti-Zia" and are financed by Libya, has recently carried articles propagating the "Khalistan" cause.

This line of investigation will help focus developments which constitute a clear and present danger to the region: the unholy alliance of fundamentalist separatists and the peace-loving anti-imperialists directed by Moscow. The central fact is that Colonel Qaddafi's Libya is a known, open asset of one of India's staunchest allies, the Soviet Union.

On Nov. 22, the Libyan chargé d'affaires in New Delhi called on Indian Minister of State for External Affairs Ram Niwas Mirdha to say the allegations were "patently mischievous." In Tripoli, the Indian ambassador was called to the Libyan Foreign Office to be told of the "serious view"

Libya took of the matter. The Indian ambassador was told that Libya had always supported the policies of Mrs. Gandhi, whom the Libyan leadership and people held in "reverence."

Such protestations do not begin to cover the cracks. During Mrs. Gandhi's spring 1984 visit to Tripoli, Qaddafi denounced India's failure to politically cooperate with Libya. Qaddafi's expression of displeasure took place against a backdrop of manipulation of the salaries of India's more than 40,000 skilled workers in Libya allegedly due to balance-of-payment difficulties.

Mrs. Gandhi's support for PLO leader Yasser Arafat and her efforts to bring a halt to the Iran-Iraq war ran contrary to Qaddafi's aims.

Qaddafi's attempt in 1978 to railroad a duped Morarji Desai into giving an Indian commitment to help Libya make the Islamic bomb is further back in memory. But the colonel's high-profile campaign during the summer and fall of 1983 on behalf of "oppressed" Muslims in India is closer to mind.

Qaddafi poured funds and inspiration into the Muslim fundamentalist networks headquartered in Europe for an international campaign against India in the wake of the Assam tragedy. In August, Qaddafi told a German-language separatist journal that the Indian government was expansionist, a threat to the surrounding countries, and a "Hitler in disguise."

At the time of Mubarak's allegations, a high-powered Libyan military

delegation was closeted with its counterparts in the Kremlin. India's friends in Moscow have no intention of discarding their Libyan asset; rather than join voices calling for an investigation of Mubarak's charges, Moscow went on the defensive.

On Nov. 19, all major Indian newspapers carried the news item quoting President Mubarak's press conference statements except one. *The Patriot*, a New Delhi news daily that acts as a mouthpiece for Moscow on international issues, carried an item headlining the Libyan denial. There was no coverage of Mubarak's press conference. Days later, *The Patriot's* "Foreign Desk" authored a news analysis item on the "Bakoush Affair" arguing that the episode was a trap set for Mubarak by the CIA.

Qaddafi gains nothing by eliminating Mrs. Gandhi, *The Patriot* asserted, questioning the hit list on the ground that "Qaddafi's interest so far had been confined to the opponents of his regime in Libya and Arab leaders who have been inimical to what he considers as the wider interests of the Arab nation."

That India has been dragged into the purview of Colonel Qaddafi's "wider interests" should have been clear when Mrs. Gandhi visited Tripoli. This was demonstrated again when, on Nov. 28, British Deputy High Commissioner Percy L. Norris was murdered in Bombay by a group called the "Revolutionary Organization of Socialist Muslims." The group, which called a London news agency from Bucharest to claim responsibility, is part of the Abu Nidal faction backed by Syria and Libya against PLO chairman Yasser Arafat. Although police immediately sealed off all exits from the city, the two killers, identified as foreigners, have not been apprehended. Clearly, they have some friends in Bombay.