

In South Asia, India and Pakistan in turmoil

While the world's capitals have turned their eyes on Iran, events of great import are taking place in the strategic region of the South Asian subcontinent, Iran's neighbor to the east. Within a few weeks, the future stability and development of Pakistan is likely to be decided, with an expected decision on the case of imprisoned former Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, a decision that will mean life or death for him and perhaps for the nation of Pakistan itself. In India, a great political crisis is brewing, pitting former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, recently expelled from parliament by the ruling Janata party of Prime Minister Desai, against the ruling coalition, torn by factional tensions and united only in its opposition to Mrs. Gandhi.

South Asia now has two roads before it. One leads to a Dark Age for South Asia, a tremendous unleashing of religious, tribal, communal, and social confrontation in the region, resulting in the complete breakdown of any economic progress and the disintegration of the nations of Pakistan and India as coherent nation-states. The presence of the most obscurantist Muslim reactionaries in Pakistan's military regime, elements which are most fervent in their desire to see Mr. Bhutto dead, represents one side of this feudal path. The extreme Hindu chauvinist elements of the Rastriyo Samaj Savak (RSS), a fascist communal organization that controls a major wing of the ruling Janata party through its "secular" arm, the Jan Sangh party, is the mirror image in India.

The second path leads to full-scale industrial, agricultural, and technological development, a path requiring regionwide cooperation of the South Asian nations, along with the major powers of Europe, Japan, the United States, and the Soviet Union. The stability of the governments of Pakistan and India (leaving aside for the moment the countries of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka), governments committed to development and cooperation toward this end, is the key to progress in South Asia.

This is the real issue around the crises involving Bhutto and Gandhi. Both represent and worked during their rule toward a development and cooperation perspective for South Asia.

The dilemma of the Pakistani junta

The Pakistan situation is the most urgent at this moment. Mr. Bhutto was overthrown by a military coup on July 4, 1977, then arrested and later convicted for an alleged criminal conspiracy to murder a political opponent. His appeal on the conviction for the murder before the Supreme Court of Pakistan has ended — dramatically so with a first and only personal appearance by Bhutto before

the seven judges of the court for four days of testimony. (A report of his testimony as it appeared in the Pakistani weekly *Viewpoint* is excerpted below.) The court is now deliberating and a decision is expected within the next two weeks. Several alternatives are before the court: to return the case for retrial in lower court; to acquit Bhutto; or to uphold the conviction with or without the recommended death sentence.

The court is deliberating under the shadow of the martial law regime of General Ziaul Haq, a regime whose only visible base of support is the fundamentalist Islamic parties that have always been a small minority in Pakistan. The important grouping is the Jamaat-e-Islami, which can be compared to the Asharite movement of Ayatollah Khomeini in Iran. That comparison was actually made by Pakistan's Minister of Information, a leader of the Jamaat whose interview with this writer appears below. The Jamaat fanatics are themselves only tools of larger forces outside of Pakistan under the direction of the British Secret Intelligence Service. The SIS has a century-long history of creating, encouraging, and controlling such movements in the pursuit of their own "divide and conquer" policies on the subcontinent.

Whatever the court decides, the regime is faced with a dilemma. They can kill Bhutto, but then what? Bhutto's vast popularity is undeniable and the junta and its supporters have managed only to buy time by their systematic suppression of Bhutto's party, the Pakistan Peoples Party. There have been large-scale arrests of the party's entire leadership cadre, and a censoring of the pro-Bhutto press. The government-controlled media have conducted anti-Bhutto propaganda campaigns which seek to portray him as a combination of Hitler and the devil.

Hanging Bhutto will likely result in the complete collapse of the junta's control, a reality indicated by reported pleas from anti-Bhutto political parties who are now telling the junta not to kill the former Prime Minister.

Whatever the junta may do, those outside Pakistan who are urging Bhutto's elimination are not, as the junta may think, intending to shore up their regime. Rather, they intend to produce the kind of chaos that will inflame the entire region from Iran to Bangladesh — what Brzezinski terms "the arc of crisis."

But the word to the junta from the *New York Times* last week is that the fall of Iran requires Pakistan to be built up as a "pillar of stability," a commitment to be concretized by renewed arms shipments to the regime. This type of support only serves to embolden those in the junta and their Islamic fundamentalist supporters to act on the belief that there will be no censure on the regime