
ASIA

Indian leaders on alert

by Paul Zykofsky

Speaking before the Indian parliament last week, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi called on the "great powers to act with the responsibility that their military capabilities enjoin upon them."

"They cannot afford to make errors of judgment or act rashly," the Prime Minister said.

Mrs. Gandhi was clearly referring to the Indian fear of a U.S.-Soviet confrontation sparked out of the crises in Afghanistan and in Southeast Asia. The Indian perception is based on the emergence of a U.S.-Chinese alliance as an immediate strategic threat to India: particularly the Chinese role in fueling antigovernment insurgency in northeast India and the open Chinese control over the Pakistani and Bangladesh governments. This Sino-centered threat was referred to by Mrs. Gandhi, who said that "destabilizing developments which have taken place in Southeast and Southwest Asia have also brought the menace of confrontation closer to us."

French consultations

On the global threat Mrs. Gandhi remarked that: "There does not seem to be a single country which feels certain about its own future." When French President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing visited India this past January, shortly after Mrs. Gandhi returned to power, an agreement was made to maintain close consultations between the two governments. A special envoy of the French President arrived in the capital this past weekend. It is believed he will brief the Indian government on the recent series of meetings between European and Soviet leaders.

In her speech Mrs. Gandhi also referred to Pakistan, India's enemy in three previous wars and now closely aligned with the Peking regime. She expressed grave concern over reported efforts by Pakistan to manufacture a nuclear bomb. "We are aware of the serious implications of Pakistan acquiring this capability," she said.

Mrs. Gandhi pointed out that during the Defense Ministry budget debate a couple of members of parliament had strongly advocated that India should have an atom bomb. The prime minister reiterated India's commitment to peaceful use of nuclear energy: "at the same time we must do everything possible to enable our scien-

tists to gather knowledge and experience."

She then posed the question whether possession of one or a few atom bombs would alone deter conflict.

The significance of Pakistan's role in the region was driven home a day earlier by Foreign Minister Narasimha Rao. Speaking to the parliament, Rao warned that despite Washington's denial of a military alliance with China, during the recent meetings between Carter and Chinese premier Hua Guofeng the two countries had spoken of "a common strategic assessment." Rao added that India believes the supply of U.S. and Chinese arms to Pakistan and the new U.S. commitment to supply military hardware to China will have serious implications.

Visit from Pakistan

Rao's statements came just one day after a three-day visit to India by Pakistani Foreign Minister Aga Shahi. Shahi's July 15-18 visit, ended on a sour note when Foreign Minister Rao objected to Shahi's proposal for mutual military force reductions as well as his open discussion of the security concerns of other countries in the region, and the Kashmir issue. Rao conveyed to him that these issues should be tackled bilaterally before being given public expression. Shahi's statements were viewed here as an attempt to signal India's other neighbors to raise similar demands. In this context, Indian Information and Broadcasting Minister Vasant Sathe told a gathering in the capital last week that the disturbances in India's northeastern region were part of "a well-planned conspiracy by major powers operating close to our borders." Pointing to both the continued U.S. military buildup in Diego Garcia and the Indian Ocean as well as the seizure by the government of Chinese-made antitank weapons in the ravaged northeastern state of Tripura, Sathe stated: "We are concerned because the net is being drawn closer around us."

The "well-planned strategy" is composed of two parts, he said. "First, to wreck the northeastern region; then, to eventually bring about a dismemberment of the entire country." While in other countries the major powers have destabilized governments to bring in "their puppets," Sathe indicated that in India the aim is more obvious. "They have been infiltrating their agents into educational institutions, into the government, and capturing the press. The game of takeover by the army may not succeed in a vast country like India. The strategy here is to blow up nonissues beyond all proportion and foment disaffection, encourage divisive tendencies to bring about India's disintegration."

"The aim has always been to divert the attention of the people from the basic issues of economic revival," Sathe concluded.