

Bhutto makes first overseas trip: China

by Ramtanu Maitra

The three-day visit (Feb. 10-12) of Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto to the People's Republic of China was, in her own words, "a great success." In turn, the official *China Daily* said that Bhutto "had good reason to feel satisfied with her brief but productive trip to China," as it has "fulfilled expectations of consolidating Sino-Pakistani friendship and establishing rapport with the new Chinese leadership."

Bhutto's choice of China as the venue for her first official trip abroad as prime minister provides a clue to her future foreign policy. A week earlier, Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard Shevardnadze was in China, and successfully fixed up a summit between China's "elder statesman," Deng Xiaoping, and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachov. Afterward, Shevardnadze paid a visibly fruitless trip to Islamabad.

In establishing "rapport with the new Chinese leadership," as the *China Daily* calls it, Bhutto had a two-and-one-half-hour private meeting with Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng. What transpired during the meeting has so far been kept under wraps, but the views of the Chinese leadership in a number of key areas have been made known. Speaking at a banquet held in Bhutto's honor, Li Peng endorsed Pakistan's Afghanistan policy and expressed hope that "Afghans would establish at an early date, a broad-based government acceptable to all concerned." However, Li Peng did not clarify whether the inclusion of the ruling Kabul regime in that coalition is necessary.

The meeting with Chinese supremo Deng Xiaoping was a warm one. Deng recalled the close relation China and Pakistan had developed thanks to the efforts of her father, the late Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Deng did, however, advise Bhutto to take care of the "political instability" within Pakistan and refrain from taking revenge—a reference to the calls of some ruling party cadre to take revenge against the Zia regime for its oppression of her Pakistan People's Party and judicial murder of her father.

Upon her return to Islamabad Feb. 13, Bhutto said that she told Li Peng of Pakistan's desire to resolve the Siachen glacier issue with India. According to Pakistan, India has militarily moved inside the actual line of control and annexed a chunk of Pakistan's territory. India claimed that Pakistan landed paratroops to carve out territory in the Siachen glacier—an uninhabited area in upper Kashmir.

During her election campaign, Bhutto had accused the Zia regime of conceding Pakistani territory to India and later had pointed out that the Indian move was a violation of the

1972 Shimla agreement which called for a negotiated agreement on Kashmir.

Bhutto's trip was also a "sentimental journey," as she called it. In 1963, when her father was a cabinet minister, he had signed the first trade agreement between Pakistan and China. After he became prime minister in 1972, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, accompanied by his daughter, visited Beijing. Over the years, he visited China six times and developed personal relations with the late Prime Minister Zhou En Lai and his family, including Zhou's adopted son, Li Peng.

In the economic field, China has helped Pakistan complete some important projects, including the Heavy Mechanical Complex and Foundry and Forge in Taxila. The Chinese also helped build the Heavy Electrical Complex at Maripur, and agreed to extend long-term credits for the supply of plant and machinery. Bhutto and the Chinese officials signed an agreement on reciprocal investment and also a memorandum of understanding extending the barter trade protocol beyond 1990. This envisages trade of an additional value of \$14 million each way.

China's military assistance to Pakistan has also been significant. The news media on the Subcontinent is forever buzzing with new arms deals between China and Pakistan. The latest is the report by the Islamabad English daily, *The Muslim*, that Pakistan is ready to buy 75 F-7 fighter aircraft from China to add to a squadron acquired earlier.

The view from India

From Delhi's standpoint, there are two areas of agreement between China and Pakistan that cause concern and have provided grist for the Soviet lobby's mill. First, the nuclear energy accord, signed in September 1986, for cooperation in the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The Soviet lobby in India alleges that China has provided bomb-making know-how to Pakistan.

Second, the Karakoram Highway which provides China a fair-weather link between its westernmost Xinkiang province and Tibet. The highway, which at its northernmost tip, links up with Azad Kashmir, the Pakistani part of the disputed Kashmir, traverses Aksai Chin, an area claimed by India but occupied by China. The road is of strategic importance and provides a vital land transport artery for China. Indian Army officers have also claimed that Pakistan ceded 4,500 square kilometers of disputed territory to China. Bhutto reported that China and Pakistan had agreed upon more trade via the highway.

Political analysts in India, particularly those closer to the Soviet camp, have dismissed Bhutto's trip as yet another indication of the Sino-Pakistan axis "encircling India"—a phrase Mrs. Indira Gandhi had rejected in an interview with this news magazine in 1982. A breath of fresh air came from India's Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi when he called up Bhutto in Islamabad to congratulate her for the successful China trip, and renewed the invitation to Bhutto to visit India.