

Is Britain planning a new major crisis in Pakistan?

by Ramtanu Maitra

Fresh evidence has emerged indicating that British-sponsored plans are afoot to stage a major crisis in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region. This is likely to occur in the next period, when India and Pakistan are in the process of upgrading the level of bilateral talks to find a way to resolve some of the issues which have kept their relations sour.

On Feb. 20, Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee is set to travel to Pakistan by bus to inaugurate the first bus service linking the two countries, from the Indian capital of New Delhi to Lahore, in Pakistan's Punjab province. In Pakistan, he will hold talks with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. Pakistan's Prime Minister has reciprocated by indicating his interest in "meaningful talks" with Prime Minister Vajpayee during the latter's visit.

Earlier in February, Iran and the Taliban, after a prolonged period of tension, held talks in Dubai following successful mediation by Pakistani Foreign Minister Sartaj Aziz. This is the first time that Iranian officials held official talks with the Taliban, since Afghanistan fell under Taliban domination in 1997. Maulvi Ahmad Motevakel represented the Taliban at the talks with Iran, which followed the Taliban's expressed regrets over the murder of Iranian diplomatic personnel in Mazar-e-Sharif in northern Afghanistan last fall. The incident had strained Iran-Afghan relations, and Iran, as a show of strength, had moved a large number of troops to its border with Afghanistan, threatening an attack.

These developments and others, such as the consolidation of bilateral relations between Russia and China, between Russia and India, and the expected re-start of talks between China and India following India's nuclear tests last May, indicate that efforts are actively underway to stabilize the area, which is vital for building the South Asian routes of the Eurasian Land-Bridge, the potential lifeline for a vast multitude in the coming century.

The weak links

It is important to note that Islamabad, beside being directly involved in trying to normalize its tense relations with India, is also involved directly in efforts to ease tensions between Iran and the Taliban, and between the Taliban and

the United States. Moreover, the Russia-China-India cooperative triangle to stabilize Central Asia and make the region a highly productive growth center, will not work unless Pakistan-India relations normalize, and Russia-Pakistan relations improve.

It is significant that Islamabad is undertaking the initiative at a time when the Pakistani economy has been ravaged by the diktats of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, and the country, infested with drug money and illegal arms, has become a hotbed for terrorist activities. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, whose good intent is unfortunately not matched by an understanding of the social problems that exist in Pakistan today, must succeed in dealing with the terrorists to make his larger plans fruitful.

There is no question that the British colonial interests will do their best to prevent easing of tensions in the region. In 1995, *EIR* (March 10, pp. 43-47, and Oct. 13, *Special Report*, "New Terror International Targets South Asia") documented London's control over numbers of terrorists running amok in Pakistan. Only recently, the Pakistani newspaper *Frontier Post* reported that the British government is in fact supporting the violent Muttahida Quami Movement (MQM) group in the Pakistani province of Sindh, and in Karachi, the capital of the province, in particular. In an analysis which is remarkably similar to that of *EIR*'s, the *Frontier Post* states that the British support for terrorism is coordinated with Britain's economic warfare.

According to the *Frontier Post*, "MI6 was monitored supporting the MQM in a sustained manner; the MQM has been allowed to function in London and work openly and secretly for the establishment of 'Jinnapur'"—a separate state to be carved out of Karachi. This new state would be a "free port on the model of Hong Kong," set up to "enable London to shift British businesses from Hong Kong." More importantly, the free port would allow narcotics from Afghanistan and Central Asia to move westward, and would provide Britain ample opportunity to arm terrorists to operate freely in the Pakistan-Afghanistan-Central Asia region.

MQM terrorism is run by MI6 through MQM chief Altaf

Hussain, who has been in "self-exile" in London since 1991. Altaf Hussain orders up actions and operations of the MQM in Karachi through his associates. The Pakistan government has sought the extradition of Hussain, and British Minister of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs Derek Fatchett, after promising Islamabad that Hussain was not "disqualified from the extradition," clarified on Feb. 11 that "due to a variety of reasons the Tony Blair government had taken a decision to extend Mr. Altaf Hussain's stay for an indefinite period."

Islamabad had demanded the extradition of Hussain following a report issued by Pakistan's civilian security service, which said that a bomb attack targetting Nawaz Sharif and his family in January was linked to MQM dissidents based in London.

The Osama Bin Laden caper

On Feb. 12, the London-based Arabic newspaper *Al-Hayat*, citing unnamed "sources," reported that Fatchett, during his recent visit to Islamabad, has worked out a "deal between the Taliban and Islamabad and Britain, under which Britain pledges to curb the movement of Altaf Hussain." In return, the Taliban would control the notorious British-run terrorist Osama Bin Laden. *Al-Hayat* also said that London has agreed to allow the Taliban to open an

office in Britain.

There is no doubt that Britain has turned out to be a major player in the Bin Laden mystery. Exploiting Washington's obsession with this crippled terrorist, Britain is taking full control over Bin Laden while issuing statements that he has been offered asylum by other countries, including Iraq and Iran; both Baghdad and Tehran have denied this allegation. The objective of London, it seems, is to push Washington to carry out a military attack on Iran, and yet another on Iraq, allegedly to liquidate Bin Laden.

Washington has already made a spectacle of itself, when it attacked Afghanistan with missiles ostensibly to eliminate the dreaded terrorist. As of now, Bin Laden's whereabouts are unknown, and it is expected that he will remain in hiding till such time as a major terrorist incident occurs in the region. Such an incident may draw Washington out once more with its missiles and Stealth bombers.

Exploiting new chinks

Meanwhile, the London *Independent* reported on Feb. 15 that the "Pakistani Christians," under the aegis of the Bishop of Lahore, have formed the Sipah-e-Masiyah group. The group is modelled after the Anjuman-e-Sipah-e-Sahaba, a terrorist Sunni Islamic organization which is involved in the killing of Shia Islamic intellectuals and Christians. In 1995, the Sahaba group's leader, Zia Rehman Farooqi, went on a month-long tour of Britain to recruit volunteers (see *EIR*, Oct. 13, 1995, *Special Report*). The group has now become a major terrorist outfit, along with Harkat-ul-Ansar, in Pakistan. It operates mainly in Punjab, and is involved in daily killings.

The *Independent* also reported that one "Christian terrorist," who identified himself as "Simon Mujahid," told the newspaper that the Christians have taken up arms in Pakistan and have infiltrated hard-line Islamic organizations. Some of these Christians have reportedly spent many months in the terrorist training camps in Afghanistan and Pakistan learning guerrilla warfare techniques.

"Simon Mujahid" also told the newspaper that he decided to take up arms to protect the community after Catholic Bishop John Joseph committed suicide last year in Faisalabad. Bishop Joseph acted to protest the sentencing of a Christian to death by the Pakistani court because he supported writer Salman Rushdie in the *Satanic Verses* controversy.

The Christian angle is also being exploited by British intelligence to rev up further trouble in India. Backed by the Council of Evangelical Alliance, which includes British churches, Asian Christians based in London are planning a massive prayer vigil in March outside the Indian High Commission in London. One newly formed group, the Alliance of Asian Christians, has announced that it is agitating to exert pressure on New Delhi to protect religious freedom in India.

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