

Eurasian nations strengthen bilateral cooperation

by Mary Burdman

During his visit to Moscow on Feb. 24-28, Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji said that he firmly believes that establishing good relations among Russia, China, and South Asian countries will contribute to peace and stability in South Asia as well as throughout the world, the Chinese service of Moscow Voice of Russia World Service reported on March 1. This was a positive response to the idea expressed by Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov in New Delhi on Dec. 21, 1998, the radio report noted. Primakov had said then: "A lot depends on the policies of China, Russia, and India. If we succeed in establishing a strategic triangle, it will be very good." While Zhu Rongji's reaction was not given wide coverage, including in the Chinese press, there are many indications that the initially cool reactions of both India and China to Primakov's idea, have been changing.

On the positive side, Chinese-Indian relations are back to their regular, pre-May 1998 level; the highly productive Russian-Chinese summit has just been concluded (see last week's *EIR*, p. 4); Russian-Indian ties are being further strengthened; and, between India and Pakistan, the 50-year logjam over Kashmir and other issues may finally be being broken. On the negative side, the continued assault on the world by the British-American-Commonwealth oligarchy, is forcing nations to react. As Chinese Ambassador to India Zhou Gang stated at a seminar in New Delhi the week of Feb. 22, which discussed Sino-American relations, "The relationships between major powers are undergoing great and profound readjustment."

Prime Minister Primakov is persevering in his commitment to his policy, while demonstrating flexibility in how it is to be built. In an interview with the Chinese *Jingji Ribao* (*Economic Daily*) on Feb. 25, on the occasion of Zhu Rongji's visit, Primakov did not mention any "triangle," but stated

that the "parallel development and strengthening of bilateral relations between Russia and China, Russia and India, and China and India, would have enormous significance."

A density of meetings

There has been a density of meetings among the leaders playing critical roles in improving relations among all three nations. Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Maslyukov, responsible for trade and economic cooperation with China, who played a key role in Zhu Rongji's visit, is also the co-chairman of the Indo-Russian Inter-Governmental Joint Commission. In February, a delegation of the Russia Federation Council led by Speaker Yegor Stroyev visited India, and met Indian President K.R. Narayanan. Both called for closer cooperation among Russia, India, and China, with the view that if the world's three largest countries join forces, other nations would be "unable to order others around," Voice of Russia World Service reported. On Feb. 25 in Moscow, Zhu Rongji also had a separate meeting with Stroyev.

Russian Communist Party leader Gennadi Zyuganov, whose party holds a majority in the State Duma (lower house of Parliament) and supports the Primakov government, described the importance of Russian-Chinese-Indian relations, at a press conference in Moscow on March 5. Zyuganov said that a strategic triangle among the three nations would be the central issue in world affairs in the 21st century, in efforts to end the dominance of a single power. He expressed concern over what he called the dangerous situation facing sovereign nations, in the wake of the continued U.S. missile attacks on Iraq and NATO's threat to use force against Yugoslavia, bypassing the UN Security Council. He wondered which nation would be the next target, after Iraq and Kosova.

Large multi-ethnic countries such as Russia, China, and

India have “potential Kosovos” in Chechnya, Kashmir, and Tibet, Zyuganov warned. The three countries, which have civilizations dating back thousands of years, cannot be reconciled to the hegemonistic dominance of a single superpower and are destined to work together to facilitate the emergence of a multipolar world, Zyuganov said. Russia, India, and China have common stands on a host of vital international issues including NATO expansion, Iraq, Yugoslavia, and NATO’s efforts to take the place of the UN, he said.

In the coming months, India and Russia are planning a number of high-level political exchanges, in preparation for the summit between Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Russian President Boris Yeltsin, expected to take place toward the middle of the year in Moscow. Maslyukov is likely to visit India soon. A five-day visit by Russian Defense Minister Marshal Igor Sergeev, which was to have begun on March 11, has been delayed due to the kidnapping of a Russian general in Chechnya. However, Deputy Prime Minister Genadi Kulik, in charge of the Agriculture Ministry, is likely to visit India soon, while Indian External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh is expected to visit Moscow in the near future.

China-India ties: Back to work

In a press conference on March 7 during the meeting of the National People’s Congress, Chinese Foreign Minister Tang Jiaxuan confirmed that Yeltsin will visit China later this year for talks with Chinese President Jiang Zemin. Tang also reported, “I expect, maybe soon, the Joint Working Group on the boundary question between China and India will resume its activity.” The JWG meeting should have been held in late 1998, but the discussions were suspended after India conducted underground nuclear tests last May. In addition, China is the only nuclear weapons state with which India does not have a dialogue on nuclear issues. India’s dialogue with Russia is very friendly and thorough; India has held discussions since last May with France and the United States, and is now carrying on discussions with Britain.

“Not long ago, officials of the Foreign Ministries of China and India made useful discussions and held useful talks in Beijing,” Tang Jiaxuan said. “We hope that the Indian side will take concrete steps and make positive efforts to enable our bilateral relations to return to the track of normal development.” He added that China welcomes efforts by India and Pakistan toward improving their relations.

An Indian delegation, led by Indian Joint Secretary for China T.C.A. Rangachary, visited Beijing on Feb. 25-26, to discuss “bilateral, regional, and international issues.” During this meeting, the decision was taken to revive the JWG talks, likely to commence within the next six weeks. As Amb. Zhou Gang stated at a seminar on Sino-Indian relations in New Delhi on Feb. 25, “There exist extensive common interests between China and India, and our commonalities far outweigh our differences.” Just days before, Jaswant Singh had stated in a written document to the Indian upper house of Parliament,

that India seeks friendly ties with China. “Both sides are making efforts to further improving bilateral relations, including measures to expand bilateral trade and enhance bilateral exchanges in various fields,” he wrote.

At the seminar, Zhou Gang acknowledged that China had taken note of some of the concerns of the Indian side, including on Chinese-Pakistani relations, and China had taken “a positive, flexible, and pragmatic approach and made proper readjustment of certain policies concerned.”

On March 15 in New Delhi, the India-China Joint Business Council (JBC) will also meet for the first time since last May, under the joint auspices of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India. The Chinese delegation will be led by An Chengxin, Vice Chairman of the China council for the Promotion of International Trade, and the Indian delegation by K.K. Modi, Chairman of the India-China JBC. The meeting will discuss potential for expansion of economic and commercial relations, including specific projects involving technology transfers and joint ventures, and possibilities for new levels of cooperation, such as joint bidding in third countries, participation in project tenders, equipment supply, and infrastructure projects.

On a broader level, China has had a positive response to the Indian-Pakistani “bus diplomacy.” The arrival of Chinese Defense Minister General Chi Haotian in Islamabad, during the summit between India and Pakistan’s prime ministers in Lahore, Pakistan on Feb. 21, was not a coincidence, Pakistani Religious Affairs Minister Raja Zafar-ul-Haq revealed on March 3. The minister said that Pakistan had consulted all neighboring countries and the “Kashmiri leadership” prior to Prime Minister Vajpayee’s arrival. The timing of General Chi’s visit was not due to any mix-up in Islamabad, Indian press acknowledged.

The official Chinese *People’s Daily* published a balanced and sober commentary on the achievements of the Lahore summit on Feb. 23 (see *EIR*, March 5, pp. 43). Building positive Indian-Pakistani relations will take time and work, *People’s Daily* noted, and “fortunately, the two leaders have realized that ‘creating a peaceful and stable environment is in line with the top interests of the two nations.’ ” The two nations’ nuclear tests had “significantly changed the security situation of the two countries and South Asia, and even influenced the world security environment. Thus, the efforts of the two leaders on solving disputes through diplomatic methods are welcomed and appreciated by the two peoples and the international community.”

One or two summits will not resolve the many issues to be discussed between the two nations. “Time is needed to completely solve the divergence and disputes between the two countries,” *People’s Daily* said. “It is just like what Prime Minister [Nawaz] Sharif said, ‘We must bring prosperity to our peoples.’ Vajpayee also pointed out that ‘We have to work together to usher in a new era of trust and confidence.’ ”