

Can India and Pakistan Break the British Curse?

by Ramtanu Maitra

April 15—There are distinct indications that some forces within India and Pakistan have made headway in improving relations between their two countries. While the intent, and whatever progress has been made by their efforts, are laudable, what both sides must recognize is that a number of external, and some internal, forces will do their best to prevent consolidation of this progress. Well-wishers of both India and Pakistan must train their eyes on those who want the conflict between these two populous South Asian nations to continue.

First in that list is Britain, which harbors, and has promoted over the years, politicians, bureaucrats, immigrants, and terrorists who spare no efforts to stoke the fires of the Kashmir conflict and to organize those who are ready to lay down their lives for an independent Kashmir. Even if such an effort does not succeed, the British empire-servers “need” the conflict in order to exert influence over the area and to prevent India and Pakistan from working together for the development of their respective countries and the nations of the Eurasian landmass. London, because of its hundreds of years of involvement in the Indian subcontinent, has assets on both sides of partitioned Kashmir. Some of these are old assets, who have kept the pot boiling all this while, and some are new, and perhaps more violent.

Foreign Obstacles in Pakistan

Two other powerful forces play significant roles in keeping India and Pakistan apart.

One is Saudi Arabia, which has found an agreeable, and financially dependent, Pakistan, which is more willing than ever to promote Wahhabism, the Saudi version of orthodox Sunni Islam, in Pakistan itself, and in Central Asia. The Saudi objective is to get control of the Islamic nations by eliminating secular and independent Islamic leaders in the Arab world and Central Asia,

and to put in their place those who would pledge their religious allegiance to the Keeper of Two Holy Mosques: the Hashemite Bedouin King of Saudi Arabia.

The other key force, of course, is Washington. Although the United States no longer actively promotes this conflict, it adopts British policies in the region. For instance, the decades-old Washington-Islamabad relations were built entirely on a tit-for-tat basis. During the days when the Soviet Union was identified in Washington as the “mother of all evils,” the Pakistani military was a key cog in Washington’s machine to destabilize the Muslim parts of the Soviet Union.

That came into full view in the 1980s, when the Soviet Army moved into Afghanistan to “protect” its socialist assets there. It was a disastrous adventure, any way one looks at it. Afghanistan’s so-called socialist assets were never a consolidated political force, nor did the Afghans have any love for the invading Soviets. Seizing upon these contradiction, the West, led by the United States, and the fundamentalist Wahhabi and/or pro-Salafi regimes in the Arab world, moved in to set up the Pakistan military as the force that would carry out a proxy war for a price. The Soviets were defeated and the Pakistani military was rewarded accordingly.

In 2001, when the G.W. Bush Administration declared that the 9/11 attack on the United States was carried out by al-Qaeda, under protection of the ruling Afghan Taliban regime, Afghanistan was invaded by the United States and NATO, the latter extending its jurisdiction for the first time in the history of this dubious military alliance beyond Europe, to the doorsteps of Central Asia, part of the former Soviet Union. Washington, having fattened the Pakistani military with arms and cash, expected relations to continue as before.

But, over the years, it has found out that such rela-



PIB of India

Pakistani Prime Minister Asif Ali Zardari meets with Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh in New Delhi on April 8. There are efforts underway to improve relations between the two populous and nuclear-armed powers, but many obstacles remain to be overcome.

tions no longer hold up. The Pakistani military has its own agenda, which does not quite mesh with what the United States has demanded of Pakistan, thereby creating a separation between Washington and the Pakistani military. This may not be a permanent split leading to the end of the old pragmatic relationship, but as long the Afghanistan situation remains unresolved, no clear light will be shined on U.S.-Pakistan relations.

For instance, if, and more probably when, the U.S. and U.K. decide to wind down their Afghan operation by handing over power to a “moderate” Taliban faction, with the intent to prevent regional forces such as Russia, Iran, India, China, and Pakistan from working together in Afghanistan and Central Asia, Washington may work out yet another barter agreement, whereby the Pakistani military will be allowed to exert control over Kabul and the United States will keep on modernizing Pakistan’s military hardware. That will “revitalize” U.S.-Pakistan relations, simply because the Pakistani military, which is now lying low, will come to the fore again.

The Pakistani military, with the United States, Saudi Arabia, and the United Kingdom as its major clientele, will torpedo any attempt to improve India-Pakistan re-

lations, because it has become exceedingly corrupt. Financial corruption aside, even worse is its accommodation of jihadi forces within the military, while the military brass charms the Americans with its secular credentials. The Pakistani military, which has remained the bastion of power in that country for decades by branding India as its mortal enemy, has now incorporated within its rank and file those jihadis who are domiciled in Pakistan, but controlled from Riyadh, London, and elsewhere.

China-India Model for Economic Ties

It is relevant to note in this context that the deterioration of the U.S.-Pakistani military relations has given an uptick to Pakistan-India and Pakistan-Russia relations. Both these developments are important for re-

gional stability. One of the highlights was the April 8-9 “unofficial” visit by Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari to India, and his one-on-one meeting with Premier Manmohan Singh. Reports indicate that during their talks, Zardari argued that an improvement in economic ties between the two countries should not be held hostage to the various irritants, and cited the Sino-India template to drive home his argument.

This is a reference to the improvement that has occurred in trade and economic relations between India and China, even while the decades-long boundary dispute between the two remains in the process of resolution. India and China have managed to scale up annual bilateral trade to over \$70 billion and have set an ambitious target of \$100 billion by 2015.

India and Pakistan could also work purposefully toward improving economic ties to mutual advantage, while taking a long-range strategic view to resolving complex issues like Kashmir, nuclear weapons, and missiles. Bilateral trade between India and Pakistan stands at a mere \$2.7 billion, and there is little doubt that cooperative economic relations would raise this figure significantly. Expanded trade would generate powerful forces within each country who would like to see peaceful relations between the two

countries and stability in the region.

Trade between India and Pakistan has greatly improved in recent months. Pakistan has switched to a "negative list" system, specifying which products cannot be imported from India—which means that everything not on the list can be imported; this is understood as a move to boost trade. Pakistan has committed itself to grant Most Favored Nation status to India by the end of the year. (India already granted MFN status to Pakistan in 1995.) Both countries are working on simpler rules governing business visas.

On April 13, India said it would allow a flow of foreign direct investment (FDI) from Pakistan soon. "India has taken an in-principle decision, as a part of the process to deepen our economic engagement, to allow foreign direct investments from Pakistan in India," India's Commerce and Industry Minister Anand Sharma said in New Delhi at a joint news conference with his Pakistani counterpart, Makhdoom Amin Fahim. Under the current rules, Pakistani citizens cannot directly invest in India. The consolidated FDI policy of the Ministry of Commerce says, "A non-resident entity (other than a citizen of Pakistan or an entity incorporated in Pakistan) can invest in India, subject to the FDI policy."

Sharma added that an India-Pakistan Business Council would be set up in the coming days. Cooperation will also be extended to opening branches of banks from both countries in each other's territory. "RBI [Reserve Bank of India] and State Bank of Pakistan are in favor of opening branches," Sharma said.

India has also reportedly extended its own friendly gesture to Pakistan by offering 5,000 MW of electricity when Prime Minister Singh met his Pakistani counterpart, Yousuf Raza Gilani, on the sidelines of the Seoul Nuclear Security Summit on March 29. The energy offer could help Pakistan's urgent need for power and, according to *Zee News* in India, "could be transmitted through Punjab without much delay."



The hotel in Mumbai, India, attacked by terrorists in 2008. The group that planned and executed it was harbored in Pakistan, and there is a political lobby in India that says events such as this make it impossible to improve relations with that neighboring country.

Complex Internal Dynamics

There is a strong lobby in India, however, that opposes improved relations with Pakistan, on the grounds that Pakistan cannot be trusted, since it has waged a number of wars with India, was virtually openly inserting terrorists into the state of Jammu and Kashmir to undermine stability within the state, and is involved in turning the Muslim majority population within the state virulently anti-India. This lobby cites some Pakistanis' repeated references to India as a "Hindu India"—although about 170 million Muslims have long made it their home—as an indication that Pakistan's authorities would like to keep their citizens forever hostile to India, using religion as the tool.

Moreover, within India, there exists a large segment of the population, mostly English-speaking, who would like stronger ties with the West. They consider that improvement of India's relations with China is unworkable, citing China's past hostilities with India that resulted in the 1962 border skirmish over delineation of the borders drawn by the British Raj, but also because China is an "all weather" ally of Pakistan.

The 2008 attack in Mumbai, India, by terrorists from Pakistan raises another obstacle. It has been widely acknowledged that that terrorist action was carried out by the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), a terrorist group born, nurtured, and harbored in Pakistan, and that the

group also planned an executed the attack on the Indian Parliament in New Delhi in 2001.

And, yet, the LeT chief, Hafeez Sayyed, who lives freely in Pakistan under the protective umbrella of the military and the ISI security services, has not been charged in Pakistan for these terrorist attacks. U.S. Undersecretary of State Wendy Sherman's declaration in New Delhi on April 2, that the United States had put a bounty of \$10 million on Sayeed's head, did little to change the environment. Sayeed remains free, and as powerful as ever.

As a result of such developments, anti-Muslim terrorists have begun to emerge within India. Although not a dominant force, they have developed capabilities to undermine improvement of relations between these two countries.

On the other hand, the LeT, which was banned internationally, and subsequently by Pakistan, under international pressure, is now operating internationally, drawing its strength from Britain and Saudi Arabia. While it maintains its links to the Pakistani ISI, it is also a tool of the British MI6 and whoever promotes Islamic fundamentalism to undermine sovereign nation-states.

In addition, British intelligence and Tony Blair-supported British militants have gathered strength within Pakistan, drawing into their fold a large number of Pakistani military officers and ISI personnel. The Times Online (U.K.), on July 4, 2009, published an article, "British Islamists plot against Pakistan," which stated that British militants are pushing for the overthrow of the Pakistani state. Followers of the fundamentalist group Hizb ut-Tahrir (HuT) have called for a "bloodless military coup" in Islamabad and the creation of a Caliphate, in which strict Islamic laws would be rigorously enforced. At Lahore's Superior College, where the London-based militant Tayyib Muqem has set up an HuT student group, he said the organization's aim was to subject Muslim and Western countries to Islamic rule under sharia law, "by force" if necessary.

He reportedly added that Islamic rule would be spread through "indoctrination" and "military means" if non-Muslim countries refused to bow to it. "Waging war" would be part of the Caliphate's foreign policy. One of HuT's strategies in Pakistan is to influence military officers, according to the Times Online article.

Shahzad Sheikh, a Pakistani recruit and the group's official spokesman in Karachi, Pakistan, talked openly

about persuading the Army to instigate a "bloodless coup" against the present government, which, he said, is "worse than the Taliban."

The HuT's Long Reach

The *Daily Times* of Lahore, Pakistan, carried the following report on Oct. 4, 2004, on the HuT's activities in Pakistan: "They are considered a new breed of Islamic fundamentalists, who study at top British and American schools yet abhor Western values, advocate a pan-Islamic state and favor the removal of Pakistan's pro-U.S. government.

"Militancy and violence [are] not part of their agenda and they want to achieve their 'lofty goals' through a peaceful and non-violent struggle. But analysts say such men, fired by the passion of an Islamic renaissance, stand on a thin line dividing political and violent struggle.

"Hizbut Tehrir, an international Islamic group with roots from England to Central Asia, is a recent addition to myriad radical organizations striving to enforce 'true Islam' in Pakistan. The group was outlawed in Pakistan in November 2003, just three years after it started operations, but its members continue undeterred, distributing party literature and holding small meetings in efforts to expand their base. Pakistan, an ally of the United States in the war on terror, banned several militant Islamic groups, but most re-emerged under new names. Hizbut Tehrir has refused to change its name despite the closure of offices and the arrest of several members.

"British and US nationals of Pakistani origin comprise the backbone of this secretive group formed in Jerusalem in 1953. It wants to establish a supra-Islamic state on the model of the caliphate that existed in the early days of Islam. The group came to Pakistan through second-generation Pakistanis living in the West, particularly in Britain and the United States. They claim they had supporters in Pakistan for a long time but formal operations took time to establish."

In addition to the LeT and HuT, a myriad of terrorist groups function within Pakistan, under the protection of the ISI and military, one of whose objectives is to carry out Britain's empire-servers' plan to keep the India-Pakistan conflict going, through terrorist actions. Unfortunately, this is the reality on the ground, and those who wish well for both India and Pakistan have a massive task on their hands, which is to remove these thorns and make the path navigable.