

Why India Must Resolve Its Regional Conflicts

by Ramtanu Maitra

The Russia-China agreement last month in Beijing, on broad-ranging cooperation between the two nations to develop the natural resources in Siberia, and to put in place a network of railroads, has shifted the world's future economic activities to the Trans-Pacific-Indian Ocean region. At the same time, both China and India, despite the global financial collapse, have stayed on a growth path. This has happened because the world's two most populous nations had invested, although not sufficiently, in developing their infrastructure, and thus brought a section of their respective populations into the economic mainstream. In this respect, China's progress is more pronounced than that of India.

Taking strong measures, which would make the investments more productive, India may meet with more success in the future, and will be able to lift more people out of abject poverty; but the immediate challenge that lies before the Indian authorities is to stabilize that part of the world, and enhance the nation's capabilities to effectively participate in the Trans-Pacific-Indian Ocean region.

Although India has the wherewithal to become an equal partner in a Four-Power alliance—with China, Russia and the United States—to develop a new international economic system, which would ensure growth worldwide, and help billions of people who have been living precariously for decades, to seek a better life for their children and grandchildren, it must focus on resolving its historical conflicts along its borders. Resolution of these conflicts will allow India and its neighbors to exchange manpower and scientific and technological developments.

Finally, interlinking its physical infrastructure with that of Central Asia to the west, Southeast Asia to the east, and China and Russia to the north, India will become a full productive partner in the Trans-Pacific-Indian Ocean region.

Linking Up Central Asia

In 1947, at the time the British colonials left India after almost 200 years of brutal imperial control, the empire had cut up the country into three pieces. Pakistan was formed, including two of those pieces, West Pakistan and East Pakistan, separated by 1,000 miles of Indian territory. This arrangement, because of its obvious contradictions, did not last too long. In 1972, East Pakistan became Bangladesh, another independent nation, and what had been West Pakistan became Pakistan. This, however, did not change things significantly for India.

The 1947 partition of India, carried out by London—Whitehall and Buckingham Palace—enforced through its operatives working in British India, was done ostensibly to protect the interest of a significant number of Muslims who lived in Hindu-majority India. However, the way the partition was done, was to make sure that the newly formed, truncated India got its wings clipped, both east and west, thus ensuring its virtual isolation, as the British looked forward to an eventual break-up of India, as was accomplished by the European colonialists in Africa.

As late as 1991, following the assassination of Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, the *Times* of London, the premier voice of the British Foreign Office, put forward this view in an editorial entitled “Home Truths”: “There are so many lessons to be learnt from sorrowing India, and most are being muttered too politely. The over-huge federation of almost 900 million people spreads across too many languages, cultures, religions, and castes. It has three times as many often incompatible and thus resentful people as the Soviet Union, which now faces the same bloody strains and ignored solutions as India. . . .

“The way forward for India, as for the Soviet Union, will be to say a great prize can go to any States and sub-



The destruction wrought by the British imperial carve-up of the Indian Subcontinent has to be reversed, if India is to participate effectively in the Four Power alliance. To begin, India needs a land corridor through Pakistan to connect with Central Asia and beyond. The required agreements with Islamabad will benefit both countries, and the entire region.

States that maintain order without murders and riots. They should be allowed to disregard Delhi's corrupt licensing restrictions, run their own economic policies, and bring in as much foreign investment and as many free-market principles as they like. Maybe India's richest course from the beginning would have been to split into 100 Hong Kongs."

India did not break apart, but remained bottled up,

undermining its emergence as a powerful nation. India has no access to its west because of Pakistan, which has sought to establish its identity by pointing to India as its mortal enemy. Since the partitioning in 1947, that condition has remained in place. It has not only stunted India's growth, but has completely destroyed the basic fabric of Pakistan. Now, it is of utmost importance that what the British created, and perpetuated through their policies on the Subcontinent during these 60-plus years, needs to be undone.

To begin with, India needs a land corridor through Pakistan, to Central Asia and beyond. This cannot be achieved without a full agreement with Islamabad. Such an agreement will also include Pakistan's economic, scientific, and technological participation in India, taking advantage of the large technological and industrial base that India has developed over the years. Through India, Pakistan will also procure a land-based access to South-east Asia.

The Scourge of Criminal Corruption

For India, with a population of 1.2 billion and growing, access to Central Asia, Russia, Iran, Turkey, and, eventually, to Europe, is crucial for its long-term survival and its ability to play, in the near future, a significant role in providing security to this vast region. Many of the security threats on the Indian Subcontinent are spawned by the India-Pakistan conflict. A huge drug- and gun-running network has been established in the region, controlled by the international drug- and gun-

cartel mafia feeding various secessionist and terrorists groups. The 30-year war that began in 1979 with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan has brought about an explosion of opium, heroin and, hashish production in Afghanistan. The street value of the entire Afghan drug market is close to \$400 billion annually. This huge underground activity, generating hundreds of billions of unaccounted-for cash, has attracted criminals, greedy politicians, and corrupt security personnel, businessmen, institutions, and bankers.

The massive sums of money have corrupted almost the entire spectrum of society in both India and Pakistan. Unless this rot is cleaned out, a state of anarchy, which has already begun to emerge in Pakistan, will overwhelm both India and Pakistan, at the risk of destroying the future of almost 1.5 billion people.

While Pakistan has long been devastated by the opium and heroin coming in from Afghanistan, on its way to Europe and beyond, India too, now, is being badly affected, although New Delhi remains in a state of denial. In Punjab, considered the granary of India, drugs are pouring in, and there is hardly a politician there who is not taking his cut. Over the years, drug trafficking has become a lucrative business in Punjab with the active involvement of traffickers and local police under the patronage of politicians, media reports indicate. Neighboring states of Rajasthan and Himachal Pradesh act as conduits for supplying drugs.

“The problem has assumed epidemic proportions in the rural areas where unemployment is rampant,” says a patron of Punarjyot, an NGO working for the welfare of youth in Punjab. “A whole generation is as good as destroyed. Not a single village is without scores of drug addicts.”

As always happens, many of the locals are now fully involved in smuggling and narcotrafficking, procuring illegal substances from international criminal elements and disbursing those throughout the state and beyond. According to a report in the *Tribune*, a Punjab-based daily, a senior Narcotic Control Bureau officer in Chandigarh told the media: “We are able to confiscate only 10 per cent of the smuggled narcotic substance. The rest



PIB India

Indian President Pratibha Patil and Tajik President Emomali Rahmon met in September, in Dushanbe, Tajikistan's capital, where the two leaders explored economic cooperation in hydroelectric power, mining, pharmaceuticals, agricultural processing, etc.

is consumed in the market.”

For several years, Punjab was only a transit point for heroin from Afghanistan, which was being routed to other parts of the world or to metropolises in India. “Punjab is no more just a transit point now. The Afghanistani smack is being sold here and a large number of youths has taken to it,” says an official of the Narcotics Control Bureau. “International drug cartel and terrorists operating from neighboring countries are actively involved in drug smuggling,” said a police official. Social activists, however, believe that a crack-down by police would not be sufficient to deal with the situation.

“The war against the drug menace cannot be fought in a piecemeal fashion,” Dr. Manjith Singh, professor, Department of Sociology, Punjab University, told the *Tribune*. “People have to wake up to the gravity of the situation. Punjab takes pride in its Green Revolution. Now to rid the state of the malady of drugs, we need another revolution. But no one knows how long it will take.”

What Land Access to the West Will Ensure

Corruption within the Indian political system is fast reaching a point of no return. Unless India breaks out of the control of the international drug- and gun-running networks, it will face serious security threats in the coming days. As long as India remains bottled up, without land access to the west and east, conditions will

continue to deteriorate.

On the other hand, securing land access through Pakistan to Afghanistan, Iran, and Central Asia, in particular, could abruptly change the security scenario. India already has a significant level of cooperation with Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan, based on its historical ties with these countries.

In September, the President, Mrs. Pratibha Patil, was in Tajikistan, exploring further cooperation with that country. Addressing businessmen at the inauguration of India-Tajikistan Business Forum, in the presence of the Indian President, Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon said his country was also ready to cooperate with India in the fields of mining, pharmaceuticals, agricultural processing, and other new areas. Hydroelectric power was another important issue discussed during Patil's visit. Tajikistan does not have hydrocarbon resources, but it has hydroelectric power. The country is the second-largest producer of hydroelectricity in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), after Russia. Its potential, according to official figures, is about 40,000 MW, i.e., around 4% of the world's hydroelectric potential.

A government report, "Tajikistan's National Strategy for Energy Sector Development 2006-2015," noted that the country is likely to reach production of 26 billion KWH in 2010, and 35 billion in 2015. But Tajikistan produces only 17 billion KWH per year (which is about 5% of its total potential), and has to import energy from Uzbekistan. It needs greater investments in this sector. Russia, Iran, and China are involved in Tajikistan's hydroelectric sector. India is providing help for the Varzob-I Hydro-Power Station. During Patil's visit, the two leaders discussed cooperation in hydro-power. The progress of the Varzob-I Hydro-Power Station, which is being upgraded by the Indian companies National Hydro Power Corporation (NHPC) and BHEL, was reviewed. India's involvement in this sector needs to be enhanced, as this will be beneficial for both countries.



Tajikistan has immense hydropower potential, as can be seen in this photo. India is providing help for its Varzob-I Hydro-Power station.

OSCE

In addition, India's principal military cooperation in Central Asia is with Tajikistan. Like India, Tajikistan has had important ties to the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, the group whose arrival in Kabul in 2001 led to the fall of the Taliban government. India rebuilt and refurbished an air base at Ayni, outside the Tajik capital of Dushanbe. India has shown interest in deepening defense cooperation, has offered to train military personnel in Tajikistan, and has conducted several joint military exercises in both Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Historical Links with Iran and Afghanistan

With Iran, of course, India has longstanding historical ties, which have been strengthened through access by sea. India is considering building a gas-based 6,000 MW power plant in Iran, along with a 1,500-km high voltage transmission link to carry electricity back to India, Indian news media reported recently. The project is expected to cost about \$10 billion.

However, the project will be viable only if the transmission lines are land-based and run through Pakistan. "It is proposed that out of the power generated, 5,000 MW may be transmitted to India and balance 1,000 MW may be transmitted to Pakistan," the news report said, quoting an unnamed Indian official.

India has also been working with Iran to secure access to Central Asia. While this has been a topic of



The 2,775-km Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline (shown on the map) has been stymied because of India's inability to secure land access through Pakistan. In a speech in new Delhi this month, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, expressed the hope that India would soon participate in the project.

discussion for many years now, the plan has moved closer to realization over the past year, with India completing the construction of a crucial link in this route—the 218-km Zaranj-Delaram highway in Afghanistan. Zaranj is located on Afghanistan's border, while Delaram is one of the towns that are linked by the Afghan Garland Highway. Once goods reach the Iranian-Afghan border, they can be transported by the Zaranj-Delaram highway on to the Garland Highway, thence to any part of Afghanistan, and on to the Central Asian Republics. India is also in talks with Iran on the construction of a 708-km rail link from Chabahar to Fahraj within Iran.

There is also the decades-old 2,775-km Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline which has been stymied because of India's inability to secure land access from Pakistan. Work on the massive project began after Iran signed a bilateral arrangement with Pakistan in June 2009. During his visit to India Nov. 16-17, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, addressing a public event in New Delhi, pointed out that more than 100 km of the pipeline has been completed on the Iranian side, while work has begun in Pakistan. At the same time, it is evident that the pipeline cannot be productive for Iran unless India is

also a consumer. "But when you consider this pipeline bilaterally, there is a definite capacity. If we make commitments with other partners, with other pipelines, to other regions, in such a case, maybe in the future, the structure of the project may change. I do hope to have Indian participation as soon as possible," Mottaki told the Indian audience.

Like Iran, India has long historical relations with Afghanistan. Since the collapse of the virulently anti-India Taliban regime in 2002, India has invested as much as \$1.5 billion to help reconstruction of Afghanistan. Most of these investments went into building schools, hospitals, road reconstruction, and communication networks. According to Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, India has not supplied any arms and is helping the Afghan government with construction and financing of projects in power, health, and education sectors.

However, such investments have not gone down well with the anti-India factions within Pakistan. In a recent leaked report to the Pentagon, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, allegedly said that India's growing influence in Kabul could "exacerbate" regional tensions and encourage Pakistani "countermeasures" in Afghanistan, or even India. "Indian political and economic influence is increasing in Afghanistan, including significant development efforts and financial investment. In addition, the current Afghan government is perceived by Islamabad to be pro-Indian.... While Indian activities largely benefit the Afghan people, increasing Indian influence in Afghanistan is likely to exacerbate regional tensions and encourage Pakistani countermeasures in Afghanistan or India," McChrystal is reported to have said.

Whatever compulsions led to McChrystal's alleged comments, or whatever reservations he may have about the growing Indian investments, the Karzai Administration made clear that it wants Indian investments in Afghanistan. Last June, Afghanistan's newly appointed Consul General in Mumbai, Mardani Ali Qasemi, urged the Indian business community to invest more liberally in Afghanistan, and further enhance the traditional ties between the two countries. "Afghanistan has vast reserves of iron ore, thorium, gas, coal, and other minerals and it was about time Indian business invest in the country," Qasemi said.