

# India and Pakistan wage more than a war of words over Kashmir

by Susan Maitra and Ramtanu Maitra

Notwithstanding repeated pronouncements by top government officials on both sides that neither India nor Pakistan is interested in a war, the situation in Kashmir, located on the border between India, Pakistan, and China, continues to deteriorate, and if measures are not taken promptly, it could well slide into a war between nations.

Two incidents along the "Line of Actual Control" in Kashmir, on Feb. 5 and 11, have further hardened the Indian position on the issue. Frenzied mobs from Pakistan crossed the borders in the face of Indian bullets, proving the point that the Indian government has been trying to establish: namely, that the internal turmoil in the state of Jammu and Kashmir is being fueled by incessant tampering from Pakistan—with or without official connivance.

Though neither the military nor the international political equations favor Pakistan, the high-pitched campaign carried out by a section of the Pakistani media, fundamentalists, and politicians in support of the Kashmiri "liberation fighters" makes it evident that forces interested in pushing the issue to the brink are setting the pace. It further seems there is hardly anyone left who is willing to put his or her political career on the line to stem the rising tide.

## Two little 'invasions'

On Feb. 5, about 4,000 people chanting anti-India slogans and displaying banners in support of the "liberators" of Jammu and Kashmir, crossed the border at Ranbirsinghpura, near Jammu. The Pakistani Rangers patrolling the border tried unsuccessfully to stop the mob before it arrived, by shooting into the air. The better-equipped Indian Border Security Force then shot at the mob as it crossed into Indian territory, forcing the protesters to retreat. Three people were killed.

Following the incident, Punjab chief minister and the leading light in the opposition to Pakistan Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's administration, Mian Nawaz Sharif, boasted that his party, the Islami Jamhoori Ittehad (IJI) had organized the mob. Although New Delhi lodged a strong protest with Islamabad, the Indian Foreign Office was careful to note that the Pakistani Rangers *did* try to stop the mob from illegally entering the Indian part of Kashmir.

The second incident, on Feb. 11 at Chakhoti in the Uri sector, raised new questions. A pattern was being set in which the Pakistani government was proving unable, or un-

willing, to prevent what can be construed as an attempt to invade. At Chakhoti, a group of 15 individuals rushed across a bridge (the Line of Control runs along the middle of the river) to the Indian side, disregarding warning shots fired by Indian security forces. Pakistan's claim that five people were killed was promptly denied by India.

More serious, India claims that unlike the earlier incident at Ranbirshinghpura, this time the Pakistani soldiers not only failed to stop the "invaders," but actually opened fire on their security forces. This was confirmed, in effect, by Pakistan's Chief of Armed Forces Gen. Mirza Aslam Beg, who told newsmen at a reception at the Iranian ambassador's residence in Islamabad on Feb. 12: "When the Indian troops fired at the civilians, we had to fire back. Otherwise, we would have suffered more losses."

Following the incident, the Indian Foreign Office summoned Pakistani High Commissioner Basheer Khan Babar twice, and conveyed to him India's determination to repulse such "human waves" from across the border. Babar was presented with a map pinpointing 46 training camps which Pakistan has allegedly set up to provide arms training to Sikh and Kashmiri secessionists. The claim by the Pakistan-based Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front chief, Amanullah Khan, that he has 10,000 commandos at his disposal who are willing to cross into Indian Kashmir, was also brought to the ambassador's attention.

On Feb. 12, Indian Foreign Secretary S.K. Singh and Pakistan Foreign Secretary Tanveer Ahmed Khan spoke on the telephone. Singh, who had just returned from Moscow and Washington where he presented a file documenting alleged Pakistani interference in both Punjab and Kashmir, reportedly turned down his counterpart's request to show "restraint" along the border. Khan, who has scheduled his own tour of Washington, Beijing, and other capitals ostensibly to counter India's propaganda, reportedly suggested that troops refrain from using force along the border, even in the case of persistent attempts to intrude illegally.

## Little enthusiasm for war

India's decisive military advantage over Pakistan needs no elaboration. And there appears to be little international support for an escalation to war. With the exception of Iran, Pakistan has met with only a lukewarm response from the Muslim nations canvassed on support for a *jihad* (holy war)

over Kashmir. Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union has shown any inclination to beat India with the Kashmiri stick. High-level Soviet officials have endorsed the Simla Agreement as the appropriate forum to settle the Kashmir dispute, adding that Kashmir belongs to India. China has not yet shown its hand, but is expected to back Pakistan, for its own strategic compulsions.

The United States is perhaps the most decisive voice. Besides official statements that the U.S. holds the Indo-Pakistan Simla Agreement paramount in the matter of Kashmir, the Bush administration, including the National Security Council and the State Department, entertained the Indian government's brief. On Feb. 11 a senior State Department official confirmed that Pakistan has been told not to expect U.S. support for any United Nations resolutions on Kashmir. The Indian charges of Pakistani interference in both Punjab and Kashmir will be the subject of hearings in the House Subcommittee on South Asian Affairs beginning Feb. 20.

Islamabad's inability to obtain convincing support from the Muslim nations—even after Prime Minister Bhutto's assertion that the killing of Muslims in the Indian part of Kashmir is a matter of concern to the Muslim *ummah* (nation)—is not as surprising as it might at first seem. The Muslim *ummah* has taken a heavy beating since the Ayatollah Khomeini arrived on the scene with his Shia brand of super-militant Islam. The impact of Khomeini-controlled Iran has been so unnerving to the rest of the *ummah* that in many Arab nations, foreign policymaking has been reduced to an anti-Iran reflex. Teheran's overt interest in the Kashmir issue jinxed any hope Pakistan may have had of rallying the *ummah*.

Moreover, the *ummah* is already facing another crisis: Azerbaijan. Eager to benefit from Soviet economic help to rebuild their war-devastated country and to fight the "Great Satan" in Washington, Iran's President Hashemi Rafsanjani is bending over backwards to accommodate whatever the Soviets do to the Azeris. The systematic slaughter by the Soviet troops when they invaded Baku has been brushed under the rug, and Rafsanjani is even endorsing Moscow's lies that what is happening in Azerbaijan is the result of ethnic violence between the Muslim Azeris and Christian Armenians, and that Soviet troops intervened only to ease this "communal" tension.

Another section of the *ummah*, represented by Saudi Arabia, whose views were reflected in the Saudi press recently, loudly denounces the Soviet operations in Azerbaijan and refuses to indict India over Kashmir. In this view, Soviet power in Azerbaijan must be opposed, because the Soviet communist regime attempts to stamp out the Muslim religion as a matter of state policy, whereas India is not anti-Muslim.

### Political dynamite

But even though the military viability of a war over Kashmir from Pakistan's standpoint is not worth discussing, and

even though there is no international support for such an adventure, it may yet occur. This is because of the dangerous political dynamic at work in Pakistan, and the terrible bind in which the government of Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto finds itself.

Bhutto and her Pakistan People's Party, are now facing an onslaught from the opposition led by Punjab Chief Minister Nawaz Sharif. Sharif and his crowd of powerful political forces have seized on Kashmir to challenge the credentials of Bhutto, and are clearly bent upon keeping the pot boiling there. Bhutto has been diverted from even the pretense of moving the country forward since October, when Sharif and company pressed through a no-confidence motion that was only narrowly defeated after an orgy of horse-trading and palm-greasing. She has an economic disaster on her hands, and a fratricidal war in the state of Sindh.

The Pakistani opposition hopes that Kashmir will be the straw that breaks the camel's back. Their gameplan is most likely oriented around the March 20 date, when the power which the late Gen. Mohammed Zia ul-Haq gave the presidency to abolish the government and call new elections at will, will lapse. Sharif and company are aiming to present President Ghulam Ishaq Khan, whom they consider an ally, with a *prima facie* case for dissolving the government before that date. They have recently charged the Bhutto government with abandoning the Kashmiri cause, and with instigating the Sindh violence to distract attention from the "treason" in Kashmir.

The dynamics unleashed have all the characteristics of a Frankenstein monster. On the one hand, Pakistan President Ghulam Ishaq Khan claims publicly that he does not see "any immediate danger" of war. On the other, at the Feb. 10 all-party conference on Kashmir, Prime Minister Bhutto vowed to take all necessary steps in accordance with "the aspirations and wishes" of the people of Pakistan on the issue. She spoke of the close religious and cultural relations between the people of Kashmir and Pakistan and accused India of occupying Kashmir "against the wishes of the people of Kashmir." But in the same breath, Bhutto said that Pakistan did not want to create a war psychosis against India over Kashmir.

The Bhutto government declared Feb. 5 a public holiday—"Kashmir Solidarity Day"—to protest India's repression of Muslims in Kashmir. And on Feb. 12, the joint session of the National Assembly voted unanimously to accept a government resolution accusing India of oppression in Kashmir and calling for a plebiscite there. Both the PPP and IJI parties have organized two big rallies in Rawalpindi, where local leaders demanded a plebiscite in Kashmir and United Nations.

And all the while, Nawaz Sharif's buddy, the "prime minister" of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, Sardar Sikander Hayat Khan, is working day and night organizing rallies, processions, and little invasions at the border.