

## Report from Paris by Thierry Lalevée

### Diplomatic offensive in Asia

*French President Mitterrand defied U.S. policy insanity, to promise Pakistan a nuclear power plant.*

**I**t took almost a dozen years for the nuclear cooperation contract between France and Pakistan to be finally ratified. Pakistan will get its nuclear power plant. This is not a question of prestige, but of economic necessity and survival; Pakistan's current energy production takes care of only 40% of the country's actual needs. This means primitive electrification for the big cities, blackouts which endanger industrial production, a risky dependency on imported oil, and most of the country without electricity.

It was the father of the present prime minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, who had negotiated the accord with then French President Giscard d'Estaing. Barely begun, the project was ferociously attacked by the U.S. government of Jimmy Carter. For the author of the *Global 2000 Report*, a Third World country's access to nuclear energy, and hence to modern industrialization, was not only unthinkable, but anathema. Carter ruled, but it was Richard Nixon's old Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, who threatened Bhutto if the project was not stopped, with the famous phrase, "We will make a terrible example of you." Bhutto was overthrown by Zia ul-Haq in July 1977, and later hanged. Zia responded to his masters' wishes by annulling the contract with France.

No French diplomat, and certainly not the President, should have been surprised therefore by Washington's spiteful reaction, after more than a decade of manipulations against the alleged "Islamic bomb." Mitterrand simply replied, "We have decided to trust Pakistan."

But there is more to it. Mitterrand's decision, taken with Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, is a political one. The details, including important ones, remain to be worked out by experts. It will take several more months before the technical and scientific ratification of the contract, without even taking into consideration the financial aspects. There was no need for Washington, therefore, to go off half-cocked.

Washington is therefore not opposed to the nuclear plant, but to the political concept reflected in the French President's action. The U.S. government is likewise unenthusiastic about the massive flood control and water management project the French have launched in Bangladesh, but can hardly foam at the mouth over the threat of "Asiatic water" without revealing its real concerns, which are basically twofold:

- The U.S. policy toward countries like Pakistan and Bangladesh, not to mention Africa, remains malthusian. With the pretext that there is a population explosion, these countries have been denied the technical and industrial means to being anything but raw materials producers and debt payers.

- Secondly, there is the question of Asia as such. For the last two decades the United States has seen the region from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific as its privileged turf. In the past there were accords with England concerning the Commonwealth members. Now, there are accords with China and the U.S.S.R. The French presence in Asia has always been the

subject of overt or covert attacks by the Americans. Lately, the U.S. intelligence services have been mucking around in the former French colony New Caledonia.

The reopening of contacts between France and Vietnam, Paris's role in a political solution for Cambodia, its role as a headquarters for the opposition to the Chinese rulers (Bush's friends), and its economic penetration in Southeast Asia in Singapore and Thailand are a thorn in the U.S. side.

Further showing France's independent course, on Feb. 23, Mitterrand said in Dakka, the capital of Bangladesh, "Our solidarity with the nations of Eastern Europe does not replace the solidarity we owe you." He went on to stress, as the Paris daily *Le Monde* described his statements, that "the regeneration of the Eastern European economies would be in the medium term an element of progress for the countries of the South."

The presence of the French President in Pakistan at a moment of great Indo-Pakistani tension was hardly by chance. It was a political gesture to strengthen the credibility of the country internationally, and especially to build up Benazir Bhutto. Her presence as the first democratically elected woman premier in a Muslim country has caused gnashing of teeth among the hardcore fundamentalists of Islam, and especially within Pakistan, where the old barons of the Zia regime, who built their fortunes on arms and drugs traffic, profiting from the Afghan war, do not hide their desire to see her end up like her father.

Despite the evident sabotage of the old colonial power, Britain, Mitterrand made an important trip to the Indian subcontinent last year, which may have given Paris additional means to play a mediating role between Islamabad and New Delhi.