

Brits charge: India equivocating in Gulf

by Susan Maitra

With a tendentious attack on Indian motives in the Gulf crisis as the lead story of the Sept. 6 *Far Eastern Economic Review*, Anglo-American operators have cranked up the campaign to force India into line behind the Washington-London game-plan in the Middle East or, failing that, to undermine New Delhi's ability to play any independent role in the quest for a negotiated resolution.

The article screams that Indian sales to Iraq of chemicals that are precursors in making chemical weapons underlie New Delhi's "equivocal stance" on the Gulf. Although it carries the byline of New Delhi correspondent James Clad, and prompted *pro forma* reactions from Indian Foreign Ministry officials, the piece has all the earmarks of a "cold storage" misinformation job that was put together in the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong, which is headquarters to the Dow Jones-owned publication.

As Indian government officials noted in a detailed response in the daily *Hindu*, the charge of chemical weapons-trading is an old one. It was first launched during the Iran-Iraq War when India was charged with supplying chemical weapons to Iran. More recently, the charge was lodged against Germany, when that nation's decision to follow U.S. orders on the Gulf was not readily forthcoming. When the charge was first leveled against India, an order placed by a German firm owned by an Iranian was traced, and the deal terminated by Indian and German action. Since then, India has adopted guidelines for the chemical industry and suspected violations are actively pursued. The main chemical in question falls into the gray area of so-called dual-use items. Thionyl chloride is used in making pesticides, but can also be turned into mustard gas. The process, however, is a messy and dangerous one, and, as Indian officials point out, there are much easier ways to produce mustard gas.

The Sept. 6 broadside coincides with a new anti-India propaganda offensive in Britain on Kashmir. A recent debate in the House of Commons featured rabid speeches from both sides on the Indian government's "brutal" denial of the Kashmiris' right to self-determination, and dilation on the latest Indian human rights group's condemnation of Indian security forces' efforts to halt the terrorist offensive in the state. The

same attack on Indian security forces figured editorially in a Saudi-backed weekly otherwise featuring propaganda for the Saudi position in the Gulf that resurfaced in New Delhi.

India was not tardy in condemning the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait and demanding withdrawal of Iraqi troops. Delhi accepted the U.N. sanctions against Iraq, but has sought to exempt supplies of food and medicine—since tens of thousands of Indians are stranded in Kuwait and Iraq.

Seeking to defuse the crisis

India has sought ways to defuse the crisis from the outset, when Foreign Minister I.K. Gujral embarked on a tour of Moscow, Washington, New York, Baghdad, and Amman. The anti-India campaign has taken off just as Gujral had written to the five permanent members conference under U.N. auspices, including Security Council members and others, to explore ways to defuse the situation. In the Indian view, though an Arab initiative is essential, resolution of the crisis requires adoption of a new, broad security concept, he argued.

Further, under Indian prodding, the foreign ministers of India, Yugoslavia (the present Non-Aligned Movement chairman), and Algeria, the next chairman, are scheduled to meet Sept. 10 to broaden the consensus for a settlement that accepts neither the Iraqi takeover of Kuwait nor an Anglo-American fiat in the Gulf. The approach has potentially great appeal among the Muslim nations such as, Malaysia. Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has come under the same kind of pressure as India for his decision not to send troops to Saudi Arabia unless Mecca and Medina were directly threatened, and that too only under U.N. command.

Even in Pakistan and Bangladesh, which both dutifully sent troops to Saudi Arabia, there is a good deal of loud opposition. In Bangladesh the Saudi-supported Jamaat-e-Islami is backing the Saudi stance, but another current around Maulana Abdul Mannan and his paper *Inquilab*, has questioned the government's decision. Mannan is reported to have close ties to Bangladesh President Lt. Gen. Ershad. On Sept. 3 the opposition Awami League led a half-day strike in Dhaka protesting the government's decision to send troops. Meanwhile, Bangladesh's Foreign Minister Anisul Islam Mahmud has been on a mysterious diplomatic tour since Aug. 28 that included meetings with Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz in Amman.

In Pakistan, the decision to send troops is widely believed to have been dictated by the United States. Persons associated with the Pakistan People's Party have challenged the decision to send troops in court as a violation of the Constitution. Most people believe that Benazir Bhutto's Aug. 6 removal by presidential decree was to make way for the Gulf caper. But others are also protesting. On Aug. 26, Islami Jamahoori Ittehad (IJI) spokesman and publisher of *The Muslim*, Agha Murtaza Pooya, called for an All Party Conference to reach a consensus on the Gulf crisis and other issues.