

friends into hysteria; they are now accusing the Mexican government of feeding a “xenophobic,” “vile,” “chauvinist,” campaign which seeks to bring back “bygone eras of sick and anti-foreign nationalism.”

To this, Government Secretary Francisco Labastida Ochoa said on Feb. 17, “We Mexicans cannot forget the lessons of our history; foreign interventions have been tragic for Mexico.” The reference was to those who supported the French invasion of Mexico which imposed Maximilian Hapsburg as emperor (1863-67), and to the loss of more than half the national territory in the U.S.-Mexican War of 1847-48, orchestrated by the southern slave-owning interests. He said that the government “will not tolerate any violation of the Constitution,” which prohibits foreigners from intervening in Mexico’s internal affairs, and defended the government’s decision to deport, since December, nearly 20 foreigners caught acting on behalf of the EZLN in Chiapas.

This was the government’s response to the EZLN’s categorical rejection on Feb. 16, of four amendments proposed by the government to the bill drafted by the Congressional Concordance and Pacification Commission (Cocopa), to implement the so-called “San Andrés Larrainzar Accords” signed by the government and the EZLN in 1996. The juridical interpretation of these accords contained in the Cocopa bill, Labastida said, “does not correspond to the spirit and letter of [said accords]; its vagueness could endanger the unity of the Mexican state, the integrity of national territory, the rights of all Mexicans, and reopen conflict on land tenure.”

The EZLN had taken advantage of the arrival in Chiapas on Feb. 16, of 200 members of a so-called International Civil Commission for Observation of Human Rights, an international front for pro-Zapatista NGOs, to announce its rejection of the amendments. That day, to the war cry of “All or nothing!,” Commander Ezequiel said at a demonstration in San Cristóbal de Las Casas, that the EZLN will allow “not a comma, nor a period, nor an accent, nor a word, nor a letter which is not included in what the legislators of Cocopa drew up.” His speech was couched in the Marxist verbiage of the first documents of the EZLN in 1994, when it declared: “We want a social revolution in which the proletariat takes control.”

The EZLN decision to force a confrontation was presaged, when Ruiz, in an attack on the Army, told the Italian daily *La Stampa* on Jan. 21: “The collision is inevitable, and thus the future will be decided in a few weeks.” On Feb. 19, acting as a spokesman for the EZLN during a trip to Europe financed by the International Coordinator of NGOs of Support and Aid for the Third World, Ruiz declared from Switzerland that “the EZLN no longer has confidence in the authorities.”

That same day, in his capacity as Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces, President Ernesto Zedillo warned Army officers that there are people willing to use Indian women and children as “cannon fodder,” and who wish to see the Army “brutally repressing” Indians, to thus feed conflict and division. The Army must avoid all such provocations, he said.

Terrorist outbreak targets South Asia

by Ramtanu Maitra and Susan Maitra

At least 30 people were killed when a series of bombs went off on Feb. 14 in the southern Indian textile city of Coimbatore, in the state of Tamil Nadu. Since then, more bombs have gone off and caches of arms, bombs, and explosives have been unearthed. The bombs were not aimed at any individual, but were placed in busy streets to kill at random and generate terror.

Al-Umma and the Jihad Committee, two Islamic groups identified with riots in November 1996, have been banned by the government of Tamil Nadu, following the reported discovery by police of an “explosive factory” in the areas where these organizations are active.

Coimbatore has become communally hypersensitive and thus easy picking for any terrorist group, within or outside India. There is little doubt from the way these bomb explosions were carried out, that the killing groups are supported and instigated from outside. Indian intelligence has already named Pakistan’s Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), charging the agency with trying to disrupt India’s parliamentary elections, the first phase of which started two days after the explosions took place.

The problem is that identifying any terrorist group as a beneficiary of the ISI, in the present context, means almost nothing. The ISI, which was transformed into its present amorphous form in the early ’90s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, is heavily infiltrated by terrorists and foreign intelligence, particularly the British MI5. How it got to be what it is, is well known by now. In the ’80s, the Western countries poured money and arms into the Pakistan-Afghanistan theater, to drive the invading Soviet forces out of Afghanistan, and they conveniently looked the other way when the Afghansi terrorists, as they are called, were trained and sustained by the ISI with the same arms that had been designated to be used against the Soviet Army.

The ISI and the Afghansi were allowed to generate “operational money” from drugs cultivated in Afghanistan. There was no accountability and there were no checks and balances. The Western nations, as well as all anti-Soviet forces in the region, paid no attention to the monster being created. They were interested only in the bottom line, which was to batter the Soviet Army in Afghanistan.

Following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, and

the subsequent collapse of the Soviet Union, ISI became a part of the international drugs-arms network operating in the region. British intelligence and the Israeli Mossad, among others, work closely with the ISI, as they also do with the terrorist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), or Tamil Tigers, to physically eliminate political leaders whenever required. The same groups are also used to supply arms to various separatist groups, large and small, operating in the subcontinent. In other words, wherever ISI's paw marks can be found, one can be sure that London is aware, if not in control.

In Coimbatore, the Tamil Tigers are also active. The Tigers, who have been identified by Washington as a terrorist outfit, continue to get their support from London. Front organizations of the Tigers, such as the World Tamil Association (WTA) and the World Tamil Movement (WTM), operate from London, while the Federal Association of Canadian Tamils (FACT) operates from Canada. Recently, in an interview with the Indian daily *The Hindu*, Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar said that the strategy "is to curb their fundraising." Despite requests from the Sri Lankan government in Colombo, however, Tamil front organizations, such as WTA and WTM, continue to raise money in the United Kingdom.

New threats to religious harmony

The Coimbatore riots and bombings are developing a permanent rift between the Muslims and Hindus, who were living in southern India in peace and harmony, unaffected by the 1947 partition of the subcontinent which deeply scarred relations between these two dominant religious groups in the north. A few months before the Coimbatore riots, the state of Karnataka, which borders the Coimbatore district of Tamil Nadu, experienced riots and a breakdown of relations between Hindus and Muslims.

Just to the west of Coimbatore is the state of Kerala, with a significant Muslim population. Over the years huge sums of money have been sent to Kerala from Kuwait, ostensibly to strengthen Islamic institutions in the state. In addition, a large number of Muslims from Kerala go to the Gulf emirates and Kuwait, as migrant workers. Money sent back by these workers has improved the standard of living of their relatives. This is being exploited by a fanatic fringe within the Hindu community, often instigated by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the shadowy organization that provides the leadership support to the largest parliamentary political party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Following the weakening of the Congress party, the only national party till the end of '80s, southern Indian states have been dominated by regional parties with narrow objectives. However, the rise of the BJP throughout southern India during the last two years has created a new situation, with long-term political ramifications.

The absence of a strong national party in the southern

Indian states caused a fragmentation of political forces there. This in turn has provided ample opportunity to various terrorist "ethnic" outfits, such as the Naxalites and Tamil Tigers, to develop a strong network. The terrorists consider the rise of the BJP in southern India as a threat to their operation. Their likely plan is to unleash terrorism throughout southern India, by instigating the fanatic fringe within the Muslim community against the pro-Hindu leanings of the BJP, to create a fear psychosis. The Tamil Tigers and the other London-controlled terrorists have all the reason to step on the accelerator now. Speaking at the 15th Asian Regional Conference of Interpol in Canberra, Australia, on Feb. 24, India's Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) chief, D.R. Karthikeyan, urged Interpol to keep a tab on all the arms and ammunition sold worldwide, in order to track down the terrorist buyers. He said that India has become a victim of international terrorism.

Why now?

At this writing, the Tamil Tigers are fighting for sheer survival within Sri Lanka. Colombo has stepped up military pressure and President Chandrika Kumaratunga has announced that the terrorist menace will be eliminated in 1998. Washington's labelling of the LTTE as a terrorist outfit is also going to affect the Tigers. Simply put, the Tigers are now desperately trying to get arms into Sri Lanka, so that their comrades can continue fighting. They are still raising money internationally by becoming an important part of the global narcotics-trafficking network. But the problem they face, is how to get large amounts of arms into Sri Lanka on a regular basis.

One safe passageway for the Tigers was to ship arms from southern Thailand and Singapore to the northeastern coast of Sri Lanka. This route had been used for a long time, and the British arms suppliers had delivered the goods to Singapore. However, this route became too exposed and the Indian Navy cut it off. A number of mid-sea encounters with the Indian Navy have forced the Tigers to abandon this route.

Subsequently, the Tigers, helped by the terrorists from northeast India, such as the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA), National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN-IM), People's Liberation Army (PLA) of Manipur, and Tripura National Volunteers (TNV), were receiving their arms along the east coast of Myanmar. On Feb. 9, a joint operation by the Indian Army, Navy, Air Force, and Coast Guard, called Operation Leech, intercepted a posse of gun runners with two trawlers and two small boats. The Operation Leech team seized 145 weapons in all—rocket launchers, M-series of rifles, AK-47s, heavy machine guns, pistols, and 40,000 rounds of ammunition, including 200 AK-47 magazines.

Reports indicate that the arms were heading toward the southeastern coast of India, from where they would travel by fast boat across the Palk Strait to northern Sri Lanka to the Tigers. Some of these arms were also marked for the Naxalites operating in the Indian state of Andhra Pradesh.