

# China's double game with India

*Susan Maitra and Ramtanu Maitra report on Beijing's friendship bid and the recent visit of the Chinese foreign minister to New Delhi.*

The March 20-24 visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Qian Qichen to India was meant, according to Indian Foreign Office spokesmen, to bring about "a higher level of political understanding" between the two countries. Qian, a former Moscow hand who reportedly dines with Henry Kissinger when in the U.S., made it a point to stop in Delhi on his way back from a six-nation tour of the Persian Gulf. Indian Foreign Minister I.K. Gujral had earlier declined an invitation to visit Beijing at the present time, pleading overwork.

On the face of it, Qian's visit was an effort to build upon the relations restored when former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi visited Beijing in December 1988. Liu Shuqing, head of the Chinese State Council's foreign affairs bureau, reportedly told a high-level visitor from India recently that China hopes not only to restore Sino-Indian relations to the level of the 1950s (the heyday of the Sino-Indian lovefest which culminated in the border clash of 1962), but to take it beyond that to the "logical level of friendship between two great countries of the world." China has also withdrawn half its divisions along the border with India's northeast.

However, China continues to undermine India's authority in the region, to build up its own assets within and around the country, and to keep alive the potential to re-ignite anti-Indian sentiments among India's neighbors. China still refuses to give up the northeast territory seized before the 1962 war; the Chinese military is continuing its nuclear arsenal buildup despite the easing of tensions with Moscow; and, China continues to provide military assistance and training to India's neighbors.

China's Janus-faced stance toward India reflects both ancient rivalry and immediate geopolitical compulsions. It is not simply that China needs friends desperately in the wake of the Tiananmen Square butchery. China's ambiguous equation with the two superpowers, coupled with its precarious internal situation, has made it all the more important to handle rival Asian power India with care.

There are at least three considerations which compel China's leaders to inject a heavy dose of "friendship" into the 40-year-old rivalry with India at the present moment. They are: Xianjiang, Tibet, and dope.

The inclusion of Kashmir on the agenda as a talking point is an indication of the first. China's strategically situated Xianjiang province stretches from Tibet and Kashmir northward and eastward along the border of the Soviet Union's

Muslim-populated Central Asian republics. At least half of China's estimated approximately 15 million Muslims live in Xianjiang, and the province, whose capital Urumqi was on the old "Silk Route," has had extensive contact with the Arab world and the Indian subcontinent since at least A.D. 650.

With the late-1970s repudiation of the Cultural Revolution, mosques were reopened and restored, and Islamic services and teaching brought out from underground. Considered to be the best-organized religion in China, Islam's resurgence coincided with the Khomeini revolution and rise of fundamentalism. Naturally, this has caused concern in Beijing, which has strictly controlled Chinese Muslims' contacts with the rest of the Muslim world, prohibited conversions, limited public broadcast of Muslim prayers, and so forth.

The upsurge in the Soviet Muslim republics bordering Xianjiang, and whose peoples straddle the border in many parts, and the eruption of Muslim militancy in Kashmir, are of serious concern to Beijing. Since the Sino-Soviet rapprochement is by no means a *fait accompli*, China cannot count on Soviet assistance in the event of Muslim rebellion spilling over the border. Under these conditions, an understanding with India on how to handle a Muslim majority could be a big help. Therefore, on the Kashmir issue, China endorsed the usage of the Indo-Pakistan bilateral Shimla Agreement and negotiations as the appropriate means to settle the issue—despite China's alliance with Pakistan. For its part, India is confident of being able to convince China to alter the wording of its statements on Kashmir so as not to include reference to the U.N. resolution which mandates a plebiscite in Kashmir and is rejected by India.

## Tibet and dope

An increasing number of statements issuing from Beijing on how well the Tibetan economy is doing and how well the Chinese government has done in "abolishing" poverty in Tibet, alongside reports from Western agencies that revolt is again brewing in Lhasa and spreading beyond the capital, point to China's concern to prevent the spread of the "East European virus" to that occupied country. China recognizes that although India has officially accepted Tibet as part of China, many in India would support such an uprising. A champion of Tibetan independence, Railways Minister George Fernandes, is now in the Indian cabinet. The Tibetan



government-in-exile, led by the Dalai Lama, is in India. In the event of an uprising, material support would have to flow through India, Nepal, or both.

In Nepal, the pro-Beijing King Birendra is under pressure from the pro-democracy movement now gaining muscle there, and may not be able to hold on to absolute power for long. China knows that if the King loses control, it is the Nepali Congress, a pro-India group, that will come to power. The pro-China, leftist King Birendra's "partyless *panchayat*" charade, has now moved into the democracy movement, and is attempting to establish a dominant position while Nepali Congress leaders are imprisoned or under house arrest.

The other consideration in China's overtures has to do with China's decision to step up dope exports as a foreign exchange earner. This year the Golden Triangle of southwestern China, Burma, and Laos has produced a bumper harvest of opium, perhaps as high as 2,500 tons. Already, Chinese heroin has been located and seized in the U.S.; China would like to keep the Sino-Indian border as little militarized as possible, keeping the door open to push drugs through India.

India has already become a major transit route for the heroin manufactured in the Golden Crescent area that comes through Rajasthan and Punjab in the west. But India's northeast, bordering Burma and Nepal, and with Calcutta as a nearby outlet, is a potentially important conduit for China's dope dealers. The area is already established as a smuggling

zone for electronic gadgets and other high-priced consumer goods as well as drugs.

### **The enemy of my enemy. . .**

The Chinese posture is a pragmatic shift in the framework of rivalry and one-upmanship vis-à-vis India that began with the birth of the communist regime in 1949, India's pathbreaking recognition of Red China notwithstanding. As the 1962 war made clear, *Hindi-Chini bhai bhai* (Hindu-Chinese friendship) was only one side of the picture during the 1950s. The other side was the frantic efforts of the Chinese communist regime to establish its geopolitical priorities over and against India—e.g., seizure of Aksai China—and to outflank Nehru for control of the emerging Non-Aligned Movement (which latter failed completely in spite of Chou En-lai's reputed brilliance and John Foster Dulles's myopia).

China's first move, after the British left the subcontinent, was to ally itself with Pakistan. The China-Pakistan relationship, which began with economic and political understandings in the 1950s, was deepened by the Sino-Soviet split and China's fear of India's growing influence among the developing nations. Pakistan, militarily dependent on the United States at that time, considered India and the Soviet Union—in that order—the principal threats to its survival. Meanwhile, Pakistan became the link in the U.S. "China card." In 1971 then U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger

sought Pakistan Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's help to open the "heavenly gates" in Beijing.

Today, more than ever, Pakistan is a key link for Beijing—to Washington, and to the Islamic world. In the wake of the Tiananmen bloodbath, Beijing used Pakistan, which did not criticize the Deng leadership, to help maintain the economic relationship with the United States. And Pakistan continues to act as China's link to the Islamic world, most recently in helping to strengthen China's relationship with both Iran and Saudi Arabia. China's interest in the competing camps of Iran and Saudi Arabia is presently centered around sales of military hardware, which China wants to push to \$500 million this year. With the INF Treaty between the U.S. and U.S.S.R., China has emerged as the only supplier of IRBMs capable of carrying nuclear warheads and with a strike range of 2000 miles.

### Nepal and Bangladesh

Of more immediate concern to India is the growing military relationship between China and Pakistan, and China's aggressive efforts to corral Bangladesh and Nepal into the arms nexus. Though Nepal's monarchy has long been a Chinese camp follower, as late as 1975 Bangladesh ignored the China card. The murder that year of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who with India's help, won Bangladesh's independence in 1971, opened the door for China.

Chinese Premier Li Peng and Foreign Minister Qian Qichen chose a high-profile tour of Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh—circling around India—as their first foray after the June uprising in China in October 1989. Li Peng kept up the rhetoric on China's desire for improved relations with India throughout, but at the same time found no contradiction in backing the Nepali King's proposal to make his country a "zone of peace"—a proposal which, in effect, nullifies the 1950 treaty governing relations between India and Nepal.

Though no military sales took place when Li Peng was in Dhaka, according to the Pakistan daily, *The Dawn*, Chinese arms assistance to Bangladesh was the top item of talks between President Ershad and Premier Li Peng. In an interview with the *Gulf News* of Dubai, Ershad later acknowledged that though Bangladesh had close defense collaboration with Pakistan, most of its arms come from China. Bangladeshi military officers are regularly trained in China, and Bangladesh's light arms are either supplied by China or manufactured at the Chinese-built Ghazipur Ordnance Factory. Frequent visits by both Pakistani and Bangladeshi military delegations to Beijing were capped recently with a visit by no less than Chinese Defense Minister Qin Jiwei to both countries.

India may not begrudge China's desire to earn foreign exchange by selling weapons. But, exhortations by Premier Li Peng, while visiting Nepal and Bangladesh, that China will always stand by these nations in their struggle to protect national sovereignty, does ring alarm bells. Who does he believe is threatening these countries?

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## Setback in Colombia

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# Anti-drug fighter ousted from cabinet

by Andrea Olivieri

"Dope, Inc.," the international narcotics cartel, has knocked out the most prominent anti-drug fighter in the government of Colombian President Virgilio Barco, and inserted one of its own in his place. Interior Minister Carlos Lemos Simmonds was forced to resign March 23, after President Barco refused to take his side in what the minister termed a "moral ambush" by the drug traffickers and their political front-men. Immediately named as his replacement was former Attorney General Horacio Serpa Uribe, a mouthpiece for pro-drug legalization circles centered around former President Alfonso López Michelsen.

"In certain areas of the government," wrote Lemos in his letter of resignation, "the attitude toward the drug trade has been changing almost imperceptibly and it is no longer as decisive, intransigent, and firm as it was last December, when it fell to me to do battle against the attempt to create a constitutional law that would fully and irreversibly favor the drug traffickers. . . . I fear that with my departure from the ministry, the drug traffickers and those who aid them, speak for them, and protect them, have won the victory that I snatched from their hands three months ago."

In a front-page commentary March 27, the anti-drug daily *El Espectador* sardonically observed that there has been a "notable silence" regarding Lemos's charges against such prominent individuals as ex-Presidents López Michelsen and Turbay Ayala and Cardinal Mario Revollo Bravo, all members of the self-styled "Notables" who have attempted to pressure the Barco government into abandoning its war on drugs for a "negotiated settlement" with the cocaine cartels. On March 30, the daily devoted its lead editorial to accusing those same individuals of "dishonoring the country." Wrote *El Espectador*, "It is the least one can say, upon learning that the front-men for criminals entered the presidential palace itself, to detail—insult of insults—their conditions for the State's surrender."

### The 'moral ambush'

On March 20, Lemos Simmonds denounced a bloody attack on a military patrol by the Moscow-linked FARC narco-terrorists, the same ones who have insistently sued for