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## PAKISTAN

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# Resistance fears danger of separatism

by Richard Katz

The agitation against martial law that has rocked Pakistan's Sind province since Aug. 14 has now reached a turning point, say leaders of the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP). For 10 days the Sind has been a scene of demonstrations and strikes numbering in the tens of thousands, burning of government buildings, and gunbattles between the population and the police and army. If the agitation spreads to other provinces, particularly Punjab, then Chief Martial Law Administrator Zia ul-Haq could face the possibility of a coup from within the military. If the agitation does not take hold in Punjab, then, say PPP leaders as well as Indian observers, the situation will quickly degenerate from a national movement for constitutional government into a bloodbath between Sindi civilians and a mostly Punjabi army. The latter eventuality would quickly fuel secessionist tendencies in the Sind, and thus create a new locus of instability on India's borders.

Hoping to forestall the latter eventuality, on Aug. 25 Nusrat Bhutto, widow of the slain Pakistani Prime Minister Z. A. Bhutto, who led the PPP, called upon Pakistanis to rise up and fight military rule. Mrs. Bhutto said that dictator Zia ul-Haq's army has taken up the gun against civilians. She called upon Pakistanis throughout the nation—in the Sind, Punjab, Baluchistan, and Northwest Frontier Provinces—to fight against martial law. She is gambling that her call will spread the movement to Punjab. PPP leaders say it will take a week to see if her call is successful.

The unrest began following Zia's Aug. 14 announcement of a plan to promulgate a bogus constitution in 1985. The agitation is led by the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD), an eight-party coalition whose strongest component is the PPP. Much of the on-the-ground leadership of the agitation is composed of landlords and *mullanahs* [Muslim clergy] allied with the PPP and MRD. In the Sind there have been demonstrations of up to 50,000 people. In some cases, agitators have burned down police stations, taken arms, and engaged in battles when the police or army tried to stop the demonstrations.

So far, however, there has been comparatively little agitation in the other three provinces: the heavily populated Punjab, and the sparsely settled Baluchistan and Northwest

Frontier Provinces. A PPP leader, whose evaluation on this point was echoed by a U.S. administration official, commented, "If Punjab doesn't rise up, then the agitation in the Sind will peter out. The army will then take revenge on the Sindi civilians." Severe tension has traditionally existed between Punjabis and Sindis. Any slaughter of Sindis will turn what is now just resentment into real separatist tendencies, as in the Bangladesh situation of 1970. So far the agitational focus has been for restoring constitutional rule, not for Sindi separatism.

"The situation is potentially very dangerous," a PPP leader told *EIR*. "Many Pakistanis think Henry Kissinger brought Zia to power as a coup not only against Bhutto, but against Pakistan itself. Maybe he counted on Zia's harsh rule to cause Pakistan to split, just like the last military government lost us Bangladesh [East Pakistan before 1970]."

Another PPP leader commented, "Zia may think he can isolate developments in the Sind, but the army is blind, deaf, and mentally retarded. They are accepting all sorts of nonsense about how secession is being backed from India. In truth the last thing the Indians want is secessionist tendencies in Pakistan because of the chain reaction it will cause." An Indian journalist made the same point: "India is saying nothing right now, lest it give the impression of interfering. But people here are very worried that a Punjabi versus Sindi bloodbath might help the separatists. It's no good for India to have such a crisis on its border."

If the worst fears come true, then instability there would join other instabilities on India's border along with those inside India, e.g. the situations in Sri Lanka, India's northeast province of Assam, and Khalistan separatism in Indian Punjab. The turmoil in Punjab has been aided by Zia and the U.S. State Department, along with British and Swiss-based factions who have long desired to "divide and conquer" India.

At least for the present, the U.S. State Department seems to want to keep Zia from unleashing a bloodbath. Wire stories in New Delhi say that the United States has advised Zia against any rash action that might fuel separatism. A high-level administration official told *EIR* on Aug. 25, "We are supporting Zia; he is the legitimate ruler. We will know in a week if the agitation will spread to Punjab. I don't think it will. The shopowners want to keep their shops open. Zia will be able to handle the Sind if Punjab stays quiet. I feel instinctively that he will avoid any kind of rash action that might fuel a separatist rebellion. I think he can calculate the political effects of harsh repression as well as anybody else."

However, as the PPP leader pointed out, Zia's harsh rule is the most important factor in promoting separatism. Whatever U.S. policymakers may think they are doing, their support for Zia—rather than giving aid to a peaceful transition to more normal rule—only adds to the instability. And, as PPP leaders have pointed out, should separatism grow in the Sind, it will revive in Baluchistan, a state in which the Soviet Union contains significant political assets.