

From New Delhi by Susan Maitra

'When it rains in Moscow . . .'

The Soviet lobby has executed a complete about-face on China since Gorbachov's Vladivostok address.

When it rains in Moscow, these fellows put up their umbrellas," is the way one Indian political leader described the local Communists in the early days of Independence. The abiding truth of the observation is being demonstrated anew in the wake of recent Soviet moves toward rapprochement with China.

Though the local Soviet lobby has no doubt been scanning the Moscow skies on this account since 1980, when the warming of Sino-Soviet relations began, Soviet party secretary Mikhail Gorbachov's July 28 Vladivostok speech seems to have hit them like a bolt from the blue. The Soviet decision to withdraw troops from Mongolia and the capitulation to China on the Ussuri River conflict, among other substantive gestures, came at a time when India's own border problems with China had heated up considerably.

In July, the seventh round of official talks between India and China to try to settle the three-decade-old border issue, over which India fought a disastrous war in 1962, ended without result. India's claim that China had made a fresh intrusion into India's northeast was raised, and, in apparent retaliation, China laid fresh claim to 90,000 square kilometers of Indian territory.

The Soviet lobby, which had long been denouncing Chinese claims as part of a U.S.-China design to destabilize the country, had its propaganda wheels spinning. Scores of articles and numerous public forums hammered

home the point. The 15th anniversary of the Indo-Soviet Friendship Treaty in August, a 20-year pact in which the two promised to come to each other's aid militarily in the event of foreign aggression, provided the appropriate background against which to highlight the dastardly plots of the American and Chinese imperialists.

Then came dramatic Soviet overtures to China, throwing a monkey-wrench into this well-oiled machinery, and the country's stunned pro-Soviet geopoliticians are just beginning to recover. The stream of anti-China articles in the pro-Soviet press here has virtually dried up, and Soviet-lobby scribes can be heard opining that India doesn't really have a positive policy toward China and had better start thinking of one.

Those quicker to regain their balance have grabbed the opportunity to launch a new push for the Soviets' pet project, an "Asian security pact," that is replete with a new "undocinaire" rhetoric. "It is my contention that irrespective of what the Soviet Union might or might not say, and irrespective of what the Chinese leadership's response might be, there exists a real problem of Asian security which is no less legitimate and valid than the problem of security in Europe," wrote a long-time Nehru family friend and promoter of Soviet causes in India, P. N. Haksar, in the introduction to a new book.

In case the news of rain in Moscow has not reached all, Soviet Vice-President V. N. Tatliev personally or-

dered the Indian umbrellas out before leaving Delhi after a week-long visit to celebrate the Indo-Soviet treaty. Tatliev was chief guest at the Independence Rally on Aug. 15, and then proceeded south to open a new chapter of the Friends of the Soviet Union, the Soviet lobby within the ruling Congress Party in Tamil Nadu. While he ventilated freely on the "U.S. imperialist design on India," and the "growing militarism of Pakistan," Tatliev's silence on China, which still occupies a large chunk of Indian territory and has just renewed its claims for more, was deafening.

At a press conference on departure, when asked whether the recent intrusion of China into Indian territory in Arunachal Pradesh was the direct result of the Soviet reduction of troops on the Sino-Soviet border, Tatliev got down to brass tacks. Assuring one and all that improvement in Sino-Soviet relations would not affect Soviet ties with India, he added that the Soviet Union is now aiming at peace and security in Asia and the Pacific, and that if India adopts the same approach, she can improve her ties with China. It was enough to make even the most die-hard Soviet lobbyist blush.

At the same time, there is no indication that all the fuss has had an impact on Indo-Soviet relations at the government level. A Gorbachov state visit is scheduled for December, and the Soviet Union is happy with India's campaign for the nuclear test-ban treaty and for sanctions against South Africa. Moreover, there is no change in India's refusal to take up the Soviet scheme for "Asian security" first proffered by the late President Leonid Brezhnev. Recognizing the need for common security for the continent, India remains wary of "pact making" among powerful nations with such divergent political and economic systems.