

Dope, Inc. tightens grip on Pakistan

by Susan Maitra

Among other scandalous features of the Pakistani government's 1990-91 federal budget, drafted according to International Monetary Fund (IMF) specifications, is a 30% cut in funding for the nation's anti-drug effort. This comes at a time when the most conservative estimates of Pakistan's dope revenues—\$8-10 billion annually—put it at almost double the country's annual budget, equivalent to some 25% of Gross Domestic Product. As in South America, very little of the drug money comes back into Pakistan—about 5%, by one estimate—but this has already had a speculative impact in real estate and a corrosive effect in the political arena.

The latest budget is not the first blow against the anti-drug program. A series of developments during 1989 demonstrated that Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto's determination to challenge Dope, Inc.—a central plank in the electoral campaign that brought her Pakistan People's Party (PPP) to power in November 1988—was hitting rough weather.

Pakistan leaped onto the drug map in 1980 when the Khomeini revolution in Iran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan disrupted the "Golden Crescent" dope flow through Iran. In 10 years, Pakistan has become one of the major sources of heroin to the West. Today, the U.S. State Department's Department of International Narcotics Matters (INM) judges Afghanistan the world's second-largest opium producer after Burma, with some 800 metric tons production in 1988 and an estimated 600 metric tons in 1989. Pakistani opium production is reportedly one-third of that, but it is in Pakistan's border areas of the North West Frontier Province (NWFP) that the bulk of Golden Crescent heroin is refined; and it is through Pakistan that the refined product travels to Europe and the United States.

From virtually zero in 1980, drug addiction has mushroomed in Pakistan itself. Addicts now number more than 2 million—and 1.2 million of those are heroin addicts. As a December 1989 exposé in the Karachi magazine *Newsline* documents, Dope, Inc. thrived under the military regime of the late President Zia ul-Haq. Now, "narco-power" is capable of destabilizing any government that threatens its business.

The fate of the PPP government's crusade against the drug barons so far underlines the point. The crackdown began with fanfare around the arrest of Jaji Iqbal Baig, a notorious alleged drug baron. But within weeks Baig was released on bail, the government having failed to produce evidence against him. Pakistan Narcotics Control Board (PNCB) offi-

cialists insist the case has not been dropped, but complain that the United States, which had promised evidence against Baig, "let us down."

Is the drug war lost?

According to the government, more than 11 top heroin-trafficking suspects have been arrested, but except for two, who were extradited to the United States, the others have either been released for lack of evidence, or the cases against them have stalled.

Baig's case is indicative of the political difficulties involved. Aside from the dubious U.S. role, Baig's links to influential politicians raise a question as to the extent to which the Bhutto government may already be compromised. Bhutto's charge that the opposition had used dope money to buy defections and destabilize her government was thrown back at her in spades during the unseemly horse-trading that finally produced a PPP victory in a vote of confidence in November 1989.

It is a known fact, reports Zahid Hussain in *Newsline*, that Anwar Khattak, in prison on a drug-trafficking charge, was contacted by PPP Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Tariq Rahim for aiding in persuading four National Assembly members who had switched to the opposition, to return to the treasury benches.

Baig's case is not the only one that points to a sinister U.S. role. The effort to nab former NWFP governor and Zia ul-Haq crony Gen. Fazle Haq on dope charges was mothballed, according to one source, under direct pressure from the Americans who feared "embarrassing revelation" on their role in fostering Dope, Inc. during the Afghan war. Fazle Haq's brother is wanted by Interpol in numerous drug cases, and Pakistani anti-drug officials claimed they had more than half of the evidence needed against Fazle Haq in hand. Yet ultimately, the general was arrested on a murder charge, and the drug charges were apparently put on hold.

"Has the government already lost the war against the drug barons?" Hussain asked in *Newsline*. It is a pertinent question. The Bhutto administration insists the battle is still on and that it remains a top priority. The government plans to introduce tough new legislation in the assembly, including provisions for confiscation of assets in drug cases, and the proposal to set up a separate anti-narcotics ministry is reportedly still alive. Under an agreement with the United States, a new 500-man elite anti-drug force is being trained by PNCB and U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration officials, and should be operational soon.

This may look good on paper, but the American involvement in the anti-drug program is a double-edged sword. Take, for instance, the U.S. pressure to eradicate poppy production—surely a misplaced priority given Pakistan's crucial role as refiner and shipper of heroin. This tactic has only kept the NWFP areas destabilized, the best cover for sustained Dope, Inc. activity.