

## From New Delhi by Ramtanu Maitra

### India-China relations at a new stage?

*Washington is flexing its muscle on Chinese missiles, which may affect Sino-Indian relations.*

Washington's reimposition of sanctions on China for allegedly supplying M-11 medium-range missiles to Pakistan, violating the 23-nation cartel prohibiting transfer of missiles, was seen by some in Delhi as an "evenhanded approach" by the United States. In 1992, Washington had imposed a two-year sanction on the Indian Space Research Organization for its efforts to purchase cryogenic rocket engine and related technologies from Russia.

However, Washington "evenhandedness" may turn out to be a sleight of hand, as there is evidence that Washington is determined to dismantle India's burgeoning missile defense system.

The sanctions against China and Pakistan were imposed less than a fortnight before Indian Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao's scheduled departure for Beijing. The Rao visit is perhaps the most significant effort to enhance Sino-Indian relations since the late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's trip in winter 1987-88. The first to China by an Indian prime minister in 34 years, the Gandhi visit was considered a qualitative breakthrough in relations, as expressed directly by Chinese Communist leader Deng Xiaoping himself.

The Rao visit has been built up as a major event in both India and China, in light of the increasingly hostile policy of the West toward both countries on security matters. This was articulated by Beijing's envoy to India, Cheng Ruisheng, at a recent forum in Delhi. Referring to the prevailing world scene, Ambassador Cheng

pointed out that three factors augur well for Sino-Indian relations: "the end of the Cold War leading to unipolar polity in international affairs; liberalization in the economic scene within both countries; and the realization among the leaders [of the need] to depend upon each other in building bridges of peace and amity leading to development for the good of the people of the region."

Referring to the doubling of trade between the two countries in the last few years and reduction of tensions along the disputed Indo-China borders, Ambassador Cheng said that India and China were already complementing each other's initiatives in international affairs, given the similarity of views on a host of issues. "From the stance at the U.N. to questions of human rights, the two countries are already linked in projecting a unified stand at various world forums," he added.

Furthermore, the ambassador said, "China is prepared to provide launch facilities for Indian satellites from its soil, given the sophistication of its space technology." Besides the optimism expressed by the Chinese envoy, independent observers have also noted that the Chinese have much less of an "enemy image" of India than Indians have of China.

One modus operandi of the Clinton administration is to exploit the differences on security issues between the two countries, to widen the rift between them.

With the imposition of sanctions on the missile transfer from China to Pakistan, the United States has con-

veyed the message to Delhi that the threat from Pakistani nuclear warheads has been significantly reduced, and that therefore India has little reason to continue with its own missile defense program or nuclear power program.

The United States has already surfaced demands for the de-nuclearization of South Asia and has issued demarches to India to stop the deployment of Prithvi short-range battlefield missiles.

On the other hand, India has steadfastly rejected the concept of de-nuclearization of South Asia, or any zone for that matter, as it demands global de-nuclearization and overall opposition to nuclear proliferation. India has also repeatedly pointed out that with hundreds of Chinese nuclear warheads and missiles in Kazakhstan and intermediate-range missiles in Saudi Arabia and Israel, India has no reason to dismantle a major part of its national defense.

Delhi has also noted that Washington's supplying of Pakistan with F-16 aircraft, which have a longer range than short-range missiles, has given Pakistan the capability to strike various Indian cities. Even if Pakistan's missile program is canned under pressure from Washington, India's defense will remain vulnerable on that score.

At the same time, India's repeated citing of China as a potential threat to India has the potential to create uneasiness within the Beijing leadership, especially among those who are most favorable to building relations with India.

It will be important for Prime Minister Rao to inform the Beijing leaders that India is entitled to a modern army, as China is also, and that the purpose of citing China's nuclear arsenal is not meant as pressure on China, but to indicate strategic realities to the West.