

Hu's visit: A post-script

DR BHARTENDU KUMAR SINGH

THE recent statement by the External Affairs Minister Shri Pranab Mukherji that China has actually 'endorsed' the Indo-US Nuclear Deal shows that President Hu Jintao's visit to India was not 'a passing visit' as mentioned in some press circles. Those familiar with the finer tenets of Chinese foreign policy will vouch that the Chinese do not believe in making sweeping changes in their foreign policy. Probably for the same reason, the Chinese chose to maintain a diplomatic stillness during Hu's visit. However, the Chinese reaction to the deal has been muted from the beginning and in all likelihood China will let this deal pass the litmus test in the Nuclear Supplier's Group (NSG).

The nuclear deal is just one example of the positive outcome of Sino-Indian engagement on numerous issues during Hu's visit. Since Rajiv Gandhi's historic initiative in 1988, every visit by the top leadership of the two countries has yielded in the setting up of new milestones in Sino-Indian relations and helped in what is aptly called graduated reciprocity in tension reduction (GRIT). This visit was no different, more so, since it was only the second visit to India by any Chinese president. The timing was appropriate since it also marked

the high tide of "Sino-Indian Year of Friendship". A number of commitments have been made last year when the Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao was in India and Hu was here mainly to consolidate those gains.

The highlight of the visit was the 'ten point strategy' embodied in the Joint Declaration. It is indeed a 'road map' for comprehensive development of bilateral relations. Some of the decisions may be repetitions but they show the resolve of the two countries to promote the diversification of bilateral relations as an irreversible trend. New targets have been set in the field of science and technology, cultural and people-to-people exchanges between the two countries. Bilateral trade and economic relations are beneficiaries of Hu's visit anyway.

The border issue remains the sore point. For the first time, China suggested acceleration of border talks and seeking an early settlement of outstanding issues. All these years, China had suggested patience on the border issue while advocating gradual improvement in other aspects of bilateral relations. Just before Hu's visit, Chinese officials released a barrage of statements claiming Arunachal as part of China. Indian strategists need to further probe and discuss Chinese intentions in raising the ante over Arunachal just before Hu's visit. Perhaps the

Chinese are playing game in the border talks in order to strengthen their bargaining position, particularly with reference to Tawang tract of Arunachal.

An emerging issue between the two countries could be the proposed diversion of Brahmaputra River. As the news leaked from the Chinese media on the eve of the visit, the Chinese Envoy to India Sun Yuxi didn't reject such apprehensions; he only said 'no formal proposal stands as of now'. Given that a large part of China is water deficit and the Chinese are surging ahead with their South-to-North Water Transfer Project, the diversion of Brahmaputra waters could add another 460 bcm to the Chinese water grid. Hu's visit saw the agreement on an expert level dialogue mechanism to discuss issues regarding Trans-border Rivers. India is already receiving valuable hydrological data from China in respect of Brahmaputra and Sutlej, now extended to Parlung Zangpo and the Lohit. It is only pertinent that India should use this dialogue to seek official clarification on China's diversion plans and undertake all preventive safeguards due to a lower riparian state.

President Hu, during his visit, spoke highly of Sino-Indian relations as having a 'regional and global potential'. The fodder is there: regional maritime security, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, natural disasters,

illegal trafficking in arms, narcotics and people, and environmental degradation. India and China get to discuss these issues on various bilateral and multilateral platforms and indeed they have been discussed. However, Sino-Indian partnership cannot be achieved unless China walks a step ahead and gives due credit to India as a great power capable of sustaining a truly multipolar world order. China was reluctant to let India become a member of the East Asian Summit held last December. Similarly, China is not willing to help India get its rightful place as a permanent member in the UN Security Council. Chinese containment game against India continues, albeit in a discreet manner.

Hu's visit, as some sections of the media commented, has made India and China 'partners' in the global balance of power game. Such painful misconstruction of relations and their romanticisation should be avoided. The two countries are great powers with legitimate aspirations and a fair amount of competition and rivalry is natural. Many bilateral issues remain to be resolved, the border being the most important. Hu's visit has shown that both countries are willing to continue the engagement game without being overtly rivals or partners.

By arrangement with IPCS, New Delhi.



CCOMPOSA: A mirage or a reality?

RAJAT KUMAR KUJUR

IN the last week of August, the Coordination Committee of Maoist Parties and Organizations of South Asia (CCOMPOSA) successfully concluded its fourth conference at an undisclosed location in Nepal. The conference was attended by the Proletarian party of Purba Bangla-CC, the Communist Party of East Bengal (ML) (Red Flag), the Bangladesh Samyobadi Dal (ML) (all from Bangladesh), the Communist Party of Bhutan (MLM), Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), Communist Party of India (Maoist), Communist Party of India (ML) Naxalbari and Communist Party of India (MLM). The Communist Party of Ceylon (Maoist), which attended the meeting, is not a signatory to the resolution, thereby indicating that it was invited as an observer to the conference. At a time when the relevance of SAARC is being widely questioned, the political leadership in South Asia can hardly afford to ignore this Maoist quest for redemption in the region. When SAARC was formed it was looked upon not only as the unified platform of South Asia in world politics, but also as a platform for regional cooperation and development. However, the experience of the past few years shows that many things are still lacking in attaining that goal. On the other hand, when CCOMPOSA was formed it was seen as just another Maoist platform. The last four years, however, show that it has established itself as the principal coordinator of Maoist Movements in different parts of the region.

The fourth CCOMPOSA meeting, through its political resolution, vowed to strengthen and expand relations among the Maoist organizations in the region and to assist each other to fight the foes in their respective countries. During the conference, the member representatives took a close look at the ground reality and declared unanimously that South Asia has become a "burning cauldron" of revolutionary movements. Even though the political leadership in South Asia is often shy to accept this, Maoist movements have become an obvious geopolitical feature of the region. In Nepal, Maoists have carved out a distinct place for them in the political structure of the country.

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Similarly, in India the merger of two major Maoist parties have given them so much strength that even Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh was forced to declare Naxalism as the single largest security challenge before the nation. In Bangladesh, despite divisions in ranks, Maoists have made strenuous efforts to unite and spread revolutionary activity to new areas.

In Bhutan "sprouts" of new Maoist movement have also begun. While hailing the People's War in Nepal, the conference also provided a suitable platform to restore normalcy in the relationship between the CPI (Maoist) and the CPN (Maoist). Recently, both the Maoist outfits were involved in a statement war with regard to the separate interpretations of Maoism in both countries. During the conference, both the CPI (Maoist) and CPN (Maoist) came out with a joint press statement in which both agreed that all tactical questions being adopted in the respective countries would be the sole concern of the national parties. At the same time, the political resolution passed at the conference asserted that the coordination committee would "deepen and extend the links between genuine Maoists of the region and increase the coordination to fight back the enemies in the respective countries." These recent developments leave one wondering why and how Maoism has prevailed here in South Asia. Does Maoism as an ideology suit South Asia or do conditions in South Asia allow Maoism to grow, or is it a combination of the two? The study of specific

Maoist movements in South Asia reveals that Maoist forces have proved to be effective in mobilizing and exciting people to commit acts of violence, with the expectation that it will bring about positive social, economic, and political change. However, the use of violence in the name of development cannot be justified, as violence itself is the greatest form of human exploitation. Effectively dealing with Maoist insurrections in South Asia will necessitate the implementation of a policy that brings new ideas, goals and projects to the peasants and rural poor. In the context of a steady Maoist march in South Asia, SAARC has a crucial role to play. The SAARC member states should initiate and encourage such consultations to develop counter insurgency measures through joint strategies, action plans and cooperative programmes. Besides, the region shares common problems such as poverty, unemployment and population explosion and successfully tackling Maoism in the region would depend on how these variables are perceived and tackled. A comparison between SAARC and CCOMPOSA may sound unrealistic today, but the political leadership in the region must not allow the Maoists to hijack the notion of regional cooperation. SAARC nations must ensure that such a situation never arises or else it would give a completely new dimension to the concept of regional cooperation.

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Where are we going?

SHAMSHER CHOWDHURY

AS we step into the 36th year of our independence I continue to be more and more angry and sad at the progressively deteriorating state of our independence and freedom. Right from day one of our hard earned independence the only glaring legacy we have been able to establish is the systematic vandalizing of democracy and democratic traditions, causing havoc with our individual and collective freedoms. The great Rahman failed us, so has the Hossains the Hasnans and the Zias. Although members of the civil society often refer to our 15 year old democracy and democratic traditions and how all that must be protected, I am appalled at their ethical and moral calling. Argue as we may, the fact remains that they too have betrayed freedom of the people in more than one way. They have contributed little but for making lofty speeches and giving a statement or two in the media. Now the country is passing through difficult times, but then did you expect any better? I for one did not. We love to talk and talk and do nothing. We talk at seminars, we talk at dialoguing sessions, we talk at meetings that often last hours, and we talk at religious meetings, at somber occasions, inside libraries, at crossroads, inside prayer halls, but are not ready to listen. We do not know how to remain quiet or ponder. We are unable to decide for ourselves and at the same time unwilling for any one to mediate on our behalf. The scenario is so complex that we are unable to differentiate a foe from a friend.

We take issues to the streets at the drop of a hat for what the dedicated band of politicians and political activists would like to describe as "establishing the voting rights of the 'people'". I wonder which people they are referring to. As far as I can see none of today's political parties represent the public at large. The

horizon of our political parties today extends only to the limits of their leaders and activists alone. They are master liars and bluffers. To me they are nothing but enemies of the public. We, the people, have been systematically used and abused by all the political parties in varying degrees. Our political parties have misled us all along with mere empty slogan of democracy. How can they be defenders of democracy when they themselves neither believe in nor practice democracy? What our politicians with the help of some ultra zealots of democracy are doing today is simply teaching the nation that the only way to solve any and all political disputes and conflicts is to get down to the streets and have it out with sticks, iron rods and guns. The saddest part of all this is that many of our high profiled members of the civil society and political analysts describe this as part and parcel of protests in what they call democracy.

I do not mind confessing that slowly and surely I am losing my faith in democracy, today it exists in name only. It has taken the form of a tailored dictatorship engineered by a handful of crafty liars. All you have to do is to look at the most powerful country of the world. How democratic is it when it continues with its adventures of invading foreign lands on all sorts of false pretexts through raging preemptive wars. Is Britain any different? For the third world countries like Bangladesh there is yet another dimension to it; it cannot proceed or advance without specific guidance and dictation of its donor mentors of the West.

We talk of democracy and we behave in a most undemocratic way. We simply do not have any tolerance for each others' point of view and speak too loud and spit venom when we talk about our opponents and even go to the extent of calling names. It is twice more unfortunate when you see that the culture is also prevailing amongst many of our so called educated and senior politicians.

Often I shut down my TV when I see that our leading political leaders are talking against each other with blood shot eyes as though he or she would kill him or her there and then if an opportunity presented itself.

As I said at the beginning, I have begun to lose my faith in our politicians. What good has it done for this country? Has it brought about a tangible level of economic emancipation for the majority of the country's population? With the kind of legacy that our politicians have built for our coming generation, I doubt if democracy and its so called benefits will ever see the light of day. The thought of going into exile has often crossed my mind but then the very next moment I had to abandon the idea with the dreadful thought that I may never return. After all, this is my country. This is where I was born; this is my identity and this will be my final resting place.

Today I am reminded of what the first critic of democracy, Thucydides, had to say on the subject - "Pericles, indeed by his rank, ability and known integrity, was enabled to exercise an independent control over the multitude in short to lead them instead of being led by them. What was nominally a democracy became in his hands a government by the first citizen. With his successors it was different, more on a level with one another, and each grasping for supremacy, they ended by committing even the conduct of state affairs to the whims of multitude."

Our politicians are elated since one-time branded enemy of democracy has joined hands with them in their struggle for what they call "restoration of democracy and voting rights of the people". Completely devoid of any scruples, these politicians resemble those engaged in the oldest profession of the world.

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Running out of options



ZAHID HUSSAIN

MUSHARRAF has tried both hard and soft tactics to stamp out radicalism along Pakistan's border. Neither has worked.

It was just before dawn when the residents of Chinagai, a small border village in the Bajaur tribal area, woke up to a thunderous blast. Then came three more explosions in quick succession. The missile attack reduced a local seminary known as Madrassa Ziaul Uloom to a huge pile of rubble. Some 85 people died -- including several children -- in the single deadliest operation launched by Pakistani forces against suspected militants in the country's lawless tribal region. Pakistani military officials said the madrassa was being used to train suicide bombers for attacks in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

The missile strike provoked a strong backlash in the border region -- and exposed a troubling reality for Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf: he has run out of options in the fight against rampant radicalism along his country's rugged western border. Thousands of armed Pashtuns took to the streets in Bajaur to protest the attack, and the demonstrations spilled over to parts of Northwest Frontier province, which is ruled by a radical

Islamic alliance known as the Muttehidha Majlis Amal (MMA). Islamists, angered by the rumor that U.S. military drones had bombed the Chinagai madrassa, whipped up anti-American sentiments in the region. "It has basically provided a propaganda tool to Taliban and Pakistani Islamists to gain sympathy," says Samina Ahmed, country director of the Brussels-based International Crisis Group.

A senior Pakistani security official called the bombing a "major counter-terrorist operation" carried out on the basis of intelligence provided by the Americans. U.S. drones had picked up unusual activity -- roughly 100 men undergoing some kind of guerrilla training in the compound. A high-resolution camera also detected a middle-aged bearded man delivering a lecture to the trainees. U.S. and Pakistani intelligence officials suspected he could be al-Qaeda No. 2 Ayman al-Zawahiri or fellow jihadist Abu al-Obaida al-Misri. The two al-Qaeda leaders had regularly visited the mountainous region, only 15 kilometers from the Afghan border. (Misri is believed to be the mastermind behind a plot this summer to blow up several jetliners flying out of London's Heathrow airport.) But there has been no indication yet that any al-Qaeda operatives were killed in the strike.

Musharraf has switched tactics

in trying to deal with the Islamists along the border, alternating from military action to peace deals and now, apparently, back to armed force. Neither approach has worked. At the heart of Musharraf's predicament is the failure of his plan to pacify pro-Taliban tribesmen in Waziristan with a peace accord. In September the Pakistani government signed a controversial truce agreement, ending a three-year-long military campaign in troubled north Waziristan in return for a pledge by tribal leaders not to give shelter to foreign fighters. But in effect, the deal only empowered the local Taliban, who have been actively involved in the Afghan insurgency.

Musharraf made the deal under pressure from his Army, which had grown disenchanted with the occupation of north Waziristan and a lack of progress in pacifying the region. Around 700 soldiers have been killed in the area, and at least six middle-ranking Army officers have been court-martialed for refusing to fight.

Pakistani officials argue that the ceasefire should create the conditions for economic development in Waziristan and elsewhere. Islamabad plans to invest millions of dollars in improving infrastructure, as well as the health and education systems, in the tribal areas, which may also help to create jobs for the tribesmen. Poverty is the

fuel for militancy in the border regions. Less than 30 percent of the tribesmen attend school of any kind. And of those who do, 90 percent drop out of primary school.

But Musharraf's policy of appeasement does not seem to be working. Far from taming the cross-border violence, the Waziristan truce appears to have contributed to deteriorating conditions in the eastern Afghan border provinces of Khowst, Paktia and Paktika. U.S. and Afghan officials maintain that the truce has made it easier for militants to send fighters and weapons across the border. "How can one expect to carry out any development work in this situation?" asks Hasan Askari Rizvi, an author and columnist for The Daily Times, an English-language newspaper.

The ICG's Ahmed says Musharraf's policy swings are "counterproductive." What might work? Maybe nothing, say experts. Any further military operation in the border areas could split the Army. And left alone, the Islamists continue to pursue jihad. Caught between the almost medieval religious fanaticism of the Islamists, a disenchanting Army and the pressing Americans, Musharraf is in a very tight spot indeed.

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