

Northern Powers Staking Claims on Areas of Control

by Mariano Aguirre

Negotiations are going on among the Northern powers on how best to moderate their competition in order to maintain shared economic and military interests in the Third World, the Middle East and East Europe, etc.

Time Running out for Rao

Tension is said to be brewing once again in the town of Ayodhya. This time as a result of a threat by the Hindu zealots to launch a mass demonstration if they are not allowed to pray at the makeshift temple which they have built at the site on which the recently razed 16th century Babri mosque stood. According to reports, the Hindu priests and holymen are demanding public rights for worship at the disputed site.

Much criticism, and justifiably so, have been heaved on the government of PV Narasimha Rao, for not having anticipated the plans of the RSS and other Hindu organisations. He tried to mitigate some of his critical lapses by taking some tough actions afterwards, like banning the fundamentalist political organisations, arresting some of the leading figures of Hindu fundamentalist movement and dismissing four state governments ruled by the BJP. Clearly, Prime Minister Rao saw that to be the only option he had before him, both for the future of his party and more importantly for the survival of the principles on which modern India was founded. He had to meet head on the forces of communalism. With this in view, he can be credited to have moved, though belatedly, against Hindu fundamentalist forces. But given his personal traits, which always tended to seek a consensus, or at least a position of compromise, he did not move fast enough, decisively enough and far enough. For example, after having sent the security forces to take over the disputed site and having driven all the so-called 'ker sevaks' out of the demolished mosque site, Rao should have immediately removed the makeshift temple and placed it at the site where already some platforms were erected earlier as a part of the proposed Ram temple. For each extra day the makeshift temple was allowed to exist, its removal became more and more difficult.

The new demand of the BJP to allow the Hindus to pray in the disputed site, is a clever move by the communal forces, the possibility of which the Rao government should have foreseen and should have quashed in the bud.

After winning the no-confidence move by the BJP, the Indian Prime Minister said that "It was time to create new history." He further said that for the first time all secular forces have become united against the communal forces. If it be so, it is indeed a good news. The big question is what will Mr Rao and his Congress Party do with this massive coalition. To paraphrase a Chinese proverb, embedded in every crisis, there lies an opportunity. The opportunity for Mr Rao, and for the Congress lies in going for an all out offensive against the communal forces. The vast majority of the deeply religious Hindus, and the secular forces do not want the type of politics that they are being led into by the RSS, VHP, BJP and the others. Having being shocked into the awareness that the very integrity of India is being threatened, they would be willing to listen to the Congress and other like minded parties if the latter launches a massive campaign for strengthening the fundamental principles — of democracy and secularism — on which modern India was founded and principles that have served India well in making it the industrial and economic power that it has become. Middle class India would know well the price of chaos, destruction and communal violence. Through this campaign the Congress and its Left Front allies will, in all probability, emerge stronger.

But for all this to happen, the initiative and the offensive must come from the Congress and especially the Prime Minister. He cannot continue to be seen only as reacting to events and not being able to take decisive action. The matter of concern is that time is not in Mr Rao's favour. He must act before it runs out.

Dhaka — Moscow Cooperation

Russia's emotional link with Bangladesh — or the vice versa — dates back to the heady days of 1971. This link the breakaway republic of the former Soviet Union shares with other republics each of which is an independent state now. But on the same token, and even on concrete terms, Russia and Bangladesh appear to be ready enough to give a new lease of life to the mutual co-operation between the two countries. A protocol signed between Dhaka and Moscow providing for consultation at the level of senior officials of the foreign ministries of the two countries at least once a year looks to be a very good beginning. Russian Federation Deputy Foreign Minister Georgiy Fridrikhovich Kunadze, during his four-day official visit, expressed optimism that the 'compatible economies' of the two countries would offer enormous opportunities for mutual co-operation between them. His interest in importing manpower from Bangladesh, for example, is an indication of the willingness to expand the areas of co-operation.

On its part, Bangladesh really stands to enormously benefit from such co-operation and joint efforts. Russia is already a big buyer of our tea, jute and leather. With the opening of Russian market to private entrepreneurs, transaction at the private level is expected to receive a tremendous boost. Already such a deal has been finalised for supplying 15,000 metric tons of raw jute and 60,000 metric tons of jute goods to a private Russian agency. The area of export from Bangladesh can surely be expanded with the inclusion of items like medicine and food-stuff. Similarly, Russia has some cheap technological expertise and industrial goods to offer in return. Given the range of mutual transactions, co-operation and collaborative ventures, there is enough scope for strengthening the relations between the two countries.

Both Russia and Bangladesh are going through a process of political and economic transition. Although they are placed at varying stages of development, their economic and social challenges are almost equally daunting. It is this economic option that should bring their lot together for a concerted drive for making their respective national economies stronger. Howevermuch they can help each other in this crucial time of their economic rebuilding effort, will ultimately go in their own favours. The task of the consultative body ought to be the identification of as many areas as possible for mutual co-operation. The fact that broad-based relations depend on concrete and mutually beneficial ventures has to be recognised before aiming something really ambitious. For both Russia and Bangladesh, economy — and economy alone — will prove to be the binding force.

WITHIN the European Community, there are two tendencies on the question of how to organise its future military system. Some propose strengthening the 'European pillar' within a reformed NATO. Others believe that the time has come to organise a more autonomous EC defence system around the Western European Union (WEU).

These conflicting perspectives surfaced most dramatically on 22 May 1992, when French President Francois Mitterand and Chancellor Helmut Kohl announced the creation of a 35,000-strong French-German joint force, the European Corps, to be deployed in Germany beginning in 1995. They invited other European countries to contribute to this embryonic 'European army'.

This French-German initiative was not well received by the Americans and the British, who criticised it strongly at a NATO meeting a week later.

On the same day of the Mitterand-Kohl announcement, NATO Secretary-General Manfred Wörner declared that NATO forces could act as peacekeeping forces in Eastern Europe on behalf of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. NATO ministers ratified this stance on 4 June 1992.

The pro-NATO camp — the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Portugal, Norway and Turkey — support a NATO in which the US maintains leadership, but with increased European military spending and control. They also support increasing NATO collaboration with the former Warsaw Pact countries.

Official NATO texts still insist that NATO is the basic security structure; EC military plans should complement it rather than challenge it. This, of course, also suits the 'superpower' stance of the Pentagon. The UK, for its part, wants to preserve its role as Washington's main ally, a role which the Gulf war reaffirmed.

The second tendency sees the US as a strategic ally of Europe, but advocates a separate EC 'defence identity', with its own armed forces coordinated by the member countries. This would include modifying the responsibilities of the EC and integrating Ireland, Greece and Denmark into the WEU. Mitterand and Jacques Delors, president of the European Commission, have advocated putting French nuclear forces at the disposal of the EC.

Since the Eurocorps, not to mention the Euroarmy, have yet to be translated into reality, Mitterand and Kohl have no problem saying they are still committed to NATO. What is left unsaid is that they anticipate a time when the US will be unable or unwilling to play so great a leading military and

political role. This is certainly the implication, though, of Mitterand's reference to the Los Angeles rebellion as evidence that the US has its own problems to which it must attend.

The debate on out-of-area operations thus alternates between those who propose reforming the 1949 Treaty of Washington to allow such operations, and those who believe these operations belong in the hands of the WEU. Washington and London hold that the WEU be allowed to take out-of-area actions, but only under NATO command.

This would give Europe both more influence within NATO and the capacity to respond with the US to world events, says Britain's Minister for Foreign Affairs Douglas Hurd. 'We could build on the WEU's experience in the Gulf when looking at how a European military role could be further developed.'

An alternative approach would subordinate NATO to a US-dominated UN Security Council. In cases of perceived threats to a NATO country, Article 53 of the UN Charter would be applied. This stipulates that the Security Council can make use of 'regional agreements and organisations', if the need should arise, to apply coercive measures under UN authority.

The UK would most likely support the US on this, with France in an ambivalent position and Russia and China abstaining. This path would lend UN legitimacy for military intervention on behalf of interests defined primarily by Washington and London, as was the case in the Gulf war.

In January, 1992, France proposed to the UN General Assembly the creation of an intervention force under UN command. This is France's way of restraining US interventionism and at the same time reinforcing the idea that there could and should be other interventionary (AKA peacekeeping) forces.

A report to the North Atlantic Assembly by NATO member country parliaments promotes reinforcing the security of the Mediterranean region through economic aid, coordination of asylum and immigration policies, and Middle East arms control. It also includes 'the capacity to respond rapidly to the military challenges that may present themselves, particularly in peacekeeping missions'.

'Peacekeeping' is the rubric under which each party attempts to consolidate its position. For the US there is the cover of UN Security Council resolutions. In 1991, France and Germany proposed sending a WEU peacekeeping force to Yugoslavia, largely to buttress the concept of European armed force. The Netherlands also proposed sending a

peacekeeping force, but under NATO command. No doubt fearing for its position in Northern Ireland, the UK rejected that proposal outright.

British and US forces, together with those of other European countries, intervened in northern Iraq in 1991 to protect Turkey from Kurds fleeing Iraq. This action was a continuation of the war, but it opened the floodgates on the debate over national sovereignty and human rights.

Rapid Reaction Forces

While the issue of out-of-area operations is debated, the potential military structures for future interventions are being organised. During the 1980s, the UK, France and Italy each created their rapid deployment forces, following the US example. Spain acquired its own in 1991. In May 1991, NATO reorganised the structure of its force and created a multinational Rapid Reaction Force.

According to Gen Peter Heinrich Carstens, commander of NATO's Allied Mobile Forces (the embryo of the Rapid Reaction Forces), the Gulf War demonstrated the extremely risky and dangerous crises may arise which must be countered... The means of confronting them must be forces which can be deployed rapidly outside the country of origin... It's quite clear that the more multinational the make-up of the force, the greater the political impact of employing it.

Referring to NATO's Rapid Reaction Forces, Gen John Galvin told Congress that among the important issues NATO would tackle in the future are 'instability in the Southern Region', and 'out-of-area contingencies'.

A good example of the practical application of the combined reform of NATO in relation to the 'Southern threat' is NATO's planned maritime force structure. This will be based on the principle of a modular multinational naval task force, and among its tasks will be 'limiting proliferation of threatening weapons and capabilities... maintaining defences against such proliferated threats: suppression of the narcotics trade. All of this would happen without regard to the claims of many countries to 200 nautical mile territorial waters, or 'economic exclusion zones'.

NATO's New Strategic Concept indirectly considers

the possibility of NATO out-of-area actions arising from 'the global context... including proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, disruption of the flow of vital resources and actions of terrorism and sabotage'.

The WEU is, for Washington, London and the Hague, a concession to the other Europeans, in return for military contributions for intervention in Eastern Europe and the Third World that would augment those of NATO. During the Gulf war, the WEU member countries conducted joint patrols in the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, the Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf. In the summer of 1991, the president of the WEU proposed formation of a WEU Rapid Reaction Force that would share equipment and forces with the proposed NATO Rapid Reaction Forces.

NATO Secretary-General Wörner, commenting on the proposed Euroarmy, said, 'Maybe this new body could assist NATO... In this case we would undoubtedly support its formation. If it could take out-of-area actions, all well and good. NATO forces could also be assigned to assist them under the umbrella of the WEU.'

From these various proposals, the idea taking shape is that in this period of transition the US and Europe could share military resources and apparatuses until roles solidify. In some cases national armies will take action on their own. In other cases action will be coordinated by the WEU, or NATO may act on its own. This system of multinational forces and intervention resources with multiple commands for different operations is known as 'double hatting'.

'We advocate a "transatlantic contract"', states Willem van Eekelen, secretary-general of the WEU. 'A new kind of "double hatting" of forces will become possible, allowing forces assigned to the Central Region to act as a rapid deployment force for the entire European theatre and in some cases for out-of-area contingencies as well. He goes on to explain that 'Europeans will want to limit joint NATO action to the defence of the treaty area... In out-of-Europe contingencies, European countries should play a larger role to protect their security interests but this should be presented as a two-pillar approach with appropriate liaison arrangements with the US.'

India Counts the Cost of Hindu Fanaticism

DK Joshi writes from New Delhi

INDIA faces an uncertain future after demolition of the historic Babri Masjid in Ayodhya which tore apart the country's secular fabric.

Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao may have averted the danger to his government by handling the aftermath with a firm hand, but this reprieve is politically temporary. The future will largely depend on the manner in which he tackles the political, economic, social and emotional fallout of the traumatic events.

His government's credibility has been rudely shaken by the drift and indecision that preceded the mosque demolition on December 6. The biggest issue for Rao is not merely to maintain law and order but to restore popular faith in the secular values of India as enshrined in its constitution.

He faces a greater challenge in future because of his government's commitment to build another mosque at the disputed site and the resolve of Hindu communal movements to prevent that.

Rao treated the Hindu organisations committed to construct Ram temple at the disputed site with kid gloves because of fear of a Hindu backlash and the loss of electoral support from religious minded Hindus.

It remains to be seen whether he and the ruling Congress Party have learnt the bitter lesson from the recent tragic happenings — namely,

that communal and fascist forces, if appeased, become a danger to a democratic and civilised society.

Five communal organisations, three Hindu — Rashtriya Swayam Savak Sangh (RSS), Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Bajrang Dal — and two Muslim — Jamiat-e-Islami and Islamic Savak Sangh — have been banned.

Large-scale arrest have been made of members of these banned organisations, including that of Lal Krishna Advani, parliamentary leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the biggest opposition party in parliament.

Rao's critics inside and outside his party fear that the arrests may become counter-productive unless backed by firm administrative action and mass educational programmes.

The communists and other secular parties have offered their co-operation in fighting the Hindu communal menace as represented by the BJP and its allies, particularly the RSS. This may lead to a new alignment of forces and an entirely new political scenario.

The communists will be wary of giving the impression that support of Rao's government implies tacit acquiescence in its economic liberalisation policy. Whether Rao will be inclined to modify this policy to secure communist support to fight the BJP is not yet clear.

A balance sheet of the gains and losses from the tragic event shows that, as well as tearing apart India's secular fabric, it humiliated the nation before the world. It has been a serious blow to the liberalisation policy and weakened the government and its moral authority, besides killing more than 1,100 people and destroying property.

However, it has also produced trends that can prove an advantage in repairing the damage. Hindu fundamentalists are on the defensive and the BJP morally mauled. The episode has prompted soul-searching among educated Indians and a realisation that loss of ideology and commitment by the Congress and other secular parties was responsible for political drift and a lust for power.

Going deeper into recent events produces the realisation that the Indian political soul is not dead. The killings after December 6 were not communal riots. No religious shrine, Hindu or Muslim, was destroyed in the mass frenzy.

The Prime Minister has blamed BJP for the tragedy at Ayodhya. His critics are not prepared to give him the alibi that he was betrayed by the BJP, which ruled the state of Uttar Pradesh, in which Ayodhya is situated. They believe his failure to anticipate the events was largely due to his style of functioning — con-

sensus and inaction — and greater concern for his own political survival than the future of India.

They argue that from the very beginning he had relied on BJP support in parliament. He saw it as a cushion against any onslaught from the left parties. He ignored the advice of Human Resource Minister Arjun Singh and others and tried to counter Singh's criticism by insinuating it was designed to dislodge him. Singh, a contender for prime ministership, was always suspect in Rao's eyes. Rao tried to isolate him.

Now Singh turns round and says: 'I told you so.' He told a party meeting how he was subjected to 'jibes and taunts' during the last five months for advocating an anti-BJP ideological line. Rao's indecisiveness and tendency to procrastinate is no longer considered an asset and a sign of maturity. It is seen in terms of weakness and lack of leadership.

The silver lining in the otherwise bleak horizon is that Indians are, by and large, politically secular. The atmosphere was vitiated only when Hindu revivalism, with the Ram temple as its symbol, was allowed to infiltrate into the political system.

India faces a dangerous future. Congress is in no danger of losing power but Rao's future is a difficult matter.

— GEMINI NEWS

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OPINION

Let Our Leaders Weigh their Words Carefully

One of the sanest things I have recently read is Mr S M Ali's Commentary published in The Daily Star on December 20. I must make it unequivocally clear at the very beginning that I place on record my total agreement with his views embodied in the Commentary not because I am a votary of the BNP or an opponent of the Awami League, but as a votary of sanity, sobriety, decorum, tolerance and circumspection in all walks of life, particularly in the turbulent political and social condition of our country when stability is the crying need of the hour.

It must be ruefully admitted that most of our public leaders do not weigh their words properly before using them in public, before making statements and speeches and expressing sentiments. Personal animosity and lack of a generous sense of appreciation and assessment drive many of us to say things which are often misleading, untrue, confusing and unreasonably contemptuous. When ordinary people utter such words, the impact is not far-reaching, although they may lead to serious personal conflicts and squabbles; but when important people or people holding important positions in life and society speak incautiously more harm is done to the country than can be perceived immediately.

But when leaders betray immaturity in their speeches a country has reason to be despondent simply because they are not leaders in the true sense of the term, fit and worthy enough to lead the country and the nation to the desired goal of stability, peace, happiness and prosperity. Immaturity seriously points to deficiency in understanding and assessing a situation, in discriminating between the proper and the improper, in determining what is to be said and when to be said, how to be said and to whom to be said. You have very rightly asserted, 'A leader must avoid the temptation of making political statements on the basis of guesses, hearsays and hunches'. Needless to say that such statements expose intellectual bankruptcy and lack of political wisdom, acumen and alertness. Francis Bacon has truly said, 'Mens Thoughts are much according to their Inclination: Their Discourse and Speeches according to their Learning, and Infused Opinions; But their Deeds are after as they have been Accustomed'. A leader must always remember — 'A Mans Nature runs either to Herbs,

or Weeds: Therefore let him seasonably Water the One, and Destroy the Other'. (Bacon). This implies an alert sense of judgement which is seldom reflected in the statements made by many a people at the helm of affairs.

One can easily trace many of our woes and ills and weaknesses to incompetent leadership which is reflected in weak statements and speeches. After all, competent leader will manifest circumspection in all his or her deeds, desires and dispositions. His or her steps will be measured and tuned to the principles and Philosophy he or she, or his or her party stands for. Remarks which are not prompted by any deep sense of responsibility will tend to point to the uncertainty in the principles and philosophy of a party or an organization and these will scare those who are committed to the service of the country and the nation as a whole.

Nobody, much less a leader, has any right to lead 'tens of thousands of people' or an unenlightened 'cheering crowd' to believing something which is, both in essence and in spirit, not backed by evidence or fact. There is already a great crisis in matters of leadership in our country. If time and circumstance prove that some of our leaders are not reliable since they are prone to deliberately concoct things to discredit those whom they oppose, the saner and wakeful section of the society will be thrown into a crisis of trust and faith. 'Unsubstantiated charges' only diminish one's stature and destroy one's credibility and make one liable to be rejected by the alert section of the people, by those who attach due importance to veracity and propriety.

There has always been, there is now and there will always be, rivalry in politics. But it should be remembered that rivalry is not enmity and should not lead to unpleasantness or baseless accusations; it should lead to healthy competition harnessed to the well-being of the country and the nation as a whole. National interest should get upperhand in all matters at all times and the principles of sanity, sobriety, good sense, judgement and good taste be allowed to prevail in all matters at all times.

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To The Editor

Accountability
Sir, Several hundred 'Bougainvillea' plants were planted along the footpath on both sides of Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue between Sonargaon Hotel and Sheraton Hotel. Unfortunately, the same people who planted them have just removed all those plants after a fortnight! Those plants were fixed by boring holes on concrete slabs and re-concreting works have begun recently. Similarly, sort of pine trees have just been planted on Motijheel-Fakirapool DIT Extension Road and the plants have been fixed between concrete slabs of road islands. There is hardly a clearance of 25-30 centimetres between the two slabs and thus within 3-4 years the bottom girth will touch the concrete slabs requiring demolishing and further reconstruction or uprooting of the trees.

Under the above backdrop and 'accountability' as repeatedly uttered by all top brasses of the present govt, who is thus accountable for what is indicated above.

Sadiq Alee
Maghbaraz, Dhaka

BTV telop

Sir, This refers to a BTV telop usually shown after Azan which depicts a Quranic verse — 'Prottek Atta ke Mritur Shad Grohon Korte Hobe' (Every soul must have taste of death) Al-Quran, Sura: Al-Ankabut (The Spider). The question is whether a 'soul' really dies? In the original Arabic verse, the word 'Nafs' has been referred. According to the Holy Quran, there are three states of man's life viz. his life in this world, his life in 'barzakh' and the great manifestation of all spiritual realities that will take place on the day of resurrection; the state of 'barzakh' being the intermediate state in which the soul lives after death till the greater resurrection. So, it implies that the soul actually never dies. What actually happens through death is a man changes his state of life.

Well, let the Islamic scholars speak on this matter, I invite their explanations.

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