Dhaka, Saturday, June 12, 1993

# Clinton's Credibility

Among many problems facing Bill Clinton, the most serious one may well be the persistent failure of the US President to set up a political base of his own, one that has credibility, strength and a stamp of the young Democratic leader's own personality. The failure is not necessarily caused by any deviousness. But it is undoubtedly a product of misjudgment on the part of the President himself, sloppy homework on the part of his staff on Clinton's nominees for high posts in the administration and the reluctance of the average American citizen to accept anything but a clear-cut ideological position.

Analysts in Washington have, therefore, come to the tentative conclusion that Clinton's move to create something of a "happy consensus", a kind of a middle ground, out of radical liberalism of the left versus orthodoxy of the right, is now sending out confused, probably wrong, kind of signals. The conclusion is tentative because the Democratic leader is capable of adjusting his course and, being an honest man, admitting his mistakes, as he did in withdrawing the nomination of Lani Guinier for a high-profile position in the human rights depart-

For a politician who won a three-cornered presidential race, without winning a majority of the popular vote, the need to put an end to divisive polities in the US administration and replace it with a "happy consensus" is certainly understand, able and even justified. Unfortunately, efforts aimed at creating such a consensus are bungled again and again. This is what causes all the concern among educated and sophisticated Americans at home and their unsure and confused friends abroad

If one draws up a list of disappointments caused abroad by Washington, the Clinton administration's failure to heal its differences with the European Community (EC) would be somewhere near the top. It is mainly over the Bosnia issue. In the latest development, reported on Thursday, the US Secretary of State, Warren M Christopher has distanced his government from the Vance-Owen peace plan which has received the EC backing. Washington wants to keep its options open, which also means that it is unable to make up its mind and refuses to play a secondary role to that of Europe, or perhaps

The Vance-Owen peace plan may not necessarily offer a magic formula for the crisis in the former Yugoslavia. However, it suggests a framework for tackling the situation by dividing Bosnia-Herzegovina into 10 provinces, mostly along ethnic lines. What is most important, the plan has been accepted by the Muslim-led Bosnian government and the Croats in Bosnia, but rejected by the Bosnian Serbs.

In sending out confused signals over the Vance-Owen peace plan, the Secretary of State has of course reiterated his government's support for European security and denied suggestions that Washington had reneged on its commitment to send ground troops to Bosnia in support of the peace accord. All this again raises questions about Washington's credibility, not only with its European partners but also with the Muslim world.

The question of the US relations with the outside world is raised again by the unexpected announcement by the administration's representative at the United Nations that it is in favour of giving permanent seats to Japan and Germany on the Security Council. The announcement failed to suggest that it was based on consultations with the US allies in Europe which has other pressing issues to tackle and in the developing world where there is a persistent demand for placing perhaps three Third World countries at the same level as Japan and Germany. Here, again the way the Clinton government is approaching the issues causes doubts and uneasiness.

# Dhaka-Manila Ties

In observing its national day today, the Philippines is looking at its future with zest and considerable hope. If there is a new mood prevailing in the archipelago, it can be attributed to the leadership of President Fidel Ramos. The General, now every inch a civilian politician, will use the occasion, his first national day after assuming power, to underscore his administration's commitment to economic resurgence to what is still often called the "sick man of ASEAN", good government and national cohesion.

The Ramos Government remains on test. After all, with all its idealism and somewhat unplanned efforts to change the course of events, the former administration of Corazon Aquino had failed to give the country a new drive to undo the damage, economic and political, social and moral, caused by the dictatorship of the Marcos era. Having had the personal support of Aquino in the presidential contest, the first challenge facing Ramos has been to prove that he is very much a man with a mind of his own, ready to produce an agenda for

his administration. The Philippine leader has done this with conviction, considerable speed and visible support from the private

It is the private sector, once a thriving segment of the country but later a victim of croynism and corruption, provides the answer to many of the country's economic problems. It still retains a strong managerial muscle and enjoys the confidence of foreign investors, especially in the field of joint ventures. The archipelago also has vast natural resources, a high rate of literacy, a powerful media playing a watchdog role and strong links with international organisations. For Ramos, there is much going in his favour. A determined, purposeful administration in Manila, which is steadily finding its feet on the ground, can change the country in coming years. Anxious as it is to promote good relations with the Philippines, Bangladesh would expect that through economic, cultural and educational exchanges. Dhaka and Manila will continue to build strong bridges of cooperation.

### Should Jute Go the Indigo Way? RACTICALLY all jute

mills in the country are running at a loss. For every hundred taka realised through sale-proceeds of jute goods, mills spend 120 to 127 taka. In 1991, total loss of all mills amounted to 84 million dollars and without state subsidy, it would have increase to 148 million dollars. For a poor country like Bangladesh, the burdens are unbearable since unit price of manufactured jute products exceed the export price by as much as 55 per cent. And, it is not only the mills: traders, spinners, practically everybody involved with the jute sector are in the red. This is borne out by the combined loss of the jute sector as a whole amounting to 200 million dollars, that is Taka 8 billion or 800 crores in 1991. Clearly, the situation is untenable - it cannot be sustained much longer.

to mind: should jute meet the same fate as indigo? It would be wrong to say that present dismal state of the jute sector have developed all of a sudden. It has been building up since the beginning of early 1970s. Since then the world imports have been declining at an average annual rate of 1.3 per cent. Inspite of what the environmentalist might say, the future also looks pretty grim. The reign of synthetic bags cannot be overcome since environmental concerns are being satisfied through reusable as well as bio-degradable synthetic materials - not by substitution in favour of tute as an environment-friendly packaging mate-

NDIAN newspaper and

news agency correspon-

dents are in a crisis

situation in the troubled states

are not hit by the terrorists,

who sometimes telephone in-

structions to us, we are over-

come by the authorities and li-

able to be shot or detained by

the security forces. It is no

pleasure now to work in this

have moved away their corre-

spondents from the troubled

city of Srinagar to the rela-

tively peaceful town of Jammu,

where government information

officers brief them on day-to-

are still not allowed to visit

centres of trouble in Kashmir.

But individually British,

American, Japanese and

German reporters have visited

the valley from time to time.

They have had the opportunity

of talking with both sides in-

volved in the bloody battles in

spondent says: 'We usually no-

tify the government before we

fly to Srinagar. Local officials

are told about our visit plans.

And sometimes security forces

escort us round towns and vil-

lages. We do not encounter

much problems either with

the security people or the mil-

itants. But it does not mean

Local officials believe that

sometimes demonstrations are

held and confrontations organ-

ised for the benefit of televi-

sion crew. And that's precisely

the reason why the Home

Ministry in New Delhi does not

encourage teams of foreign

correspondents to tour the

However, local journalists

that it is always trouble-free."

One senior foreign corre-

Groups of correspondents

Most Indian newspapers

One reporter says: "If we

of Jammu and Kashmir.

beautiful valley."

day developments.

Kashmir towns.

Inevitably, the question comes

rial. Most important, jute bags cannot be as cheap as plastic bags. Therefore, use of jute is bound to decline even in the near future. Worldwide, jute is a sunset industry. There seems to be no silver lining in the black

We should accept decline of jute as inevitable. At the sametime, it is also very true that livelihood of about 25 million people in Bangladesh, almost one quarter of the total popula tion, is linked to jute cultivation, jute industry, marketing and trade in jute. It accounts for 10 per cent of employment and 12 per cent of GDP. One third of the manufacturing output is accounted for by jute.

#### Global Substitution

There are two conflicting is sues to deal with: (1) Jute is going the indigo way; and, (ii) the overwhelming importance of jute to the national economy From this the definitive conclusion that one should draw is bound to be rather drastic: there must be global substitution of the jute economy as a whole by replacing it with much more vigorous and growth in ducing alternatives so that we can get rid of our present status as a least developed country.

The global substitution consist of three components: (i) Crop diversification away from tute so that returns to farmers are enhanced while rural employment level is also not ad versely affected; (ii) conversion only, unlike recurrent losses tive farming system devised for what can be manufactured from

of jute spinning and weaving mills into textile or yarn and fabric manufacturing industries; and, (iii) existing redun dant employees absorbed through new labour intensive, export oriented manufacturing

enterprises. World Bank recommended a strategy of reform by reducing the manufacturing capacity to the extent of at least 37 per cent and elimination of excess employment through 45 per cent reduction of the labour force. However such policy

and subsidies at present. According to World Bank re ports, the financial losses and outstanding debts of jute mills would triple by 1998; that is the combined losses of all jute mills would exceed half a billion dollars. On the other hand, conversion to new industries, as suggested above, would not only cost less, the existing financial burden would be eliminated for good. In addition, thriving industrial growth prospects on a sustainable basis might be rea sonably expected.

# WINDOW ON ASIA

Shahed Latif

pronouncements would be polit ically intolerable for the present Government or, for that matter, any Government that may come in future.

Instead, a positive approach

must be initiated through the programme of conversion of jute mills into textile units, setting up adjoining knitwear, garment, even woolen goods manufacturing factories so that an entirely new set of enterprises come on stream as the successor to jute. Only then, cooperation from trade unions might be expected. Such a total change-over might reguire more, rather than less, subsidies but it would be a oneshot affair of one or two years

In case of jute agriculture, the present technology of cultivation is highly labour-intensive although growing of jute is being increasingly confined to marginal lands which are highly flood-prone and therefore rice cultivation would tend to be a very risky business. However, intensive irrigated agriculture for high-value crops during six to seven flood-free months (November to April/May) of the year should more than compensate for the loss of jute cultivation. Flood protection would further intensify agriculture in such traditional jute lands but irrigation first should be much more cost effective. An innova-

such river deltas consist of alternative trenches of water and flood-free high ridges for fish farming and horticulture crops respectively on a year-round

### Modern Process

Unlike indigo, jute however would not suffer from total elimination. In fact local demand for jute should expand if, for example, rice processing and related by-product utilisation are modernised, manufacture of animal feed is undertaken and cement as well as fertiliser industries are expanded in a big way. For the combined output of 30 million tons of modern polished rice, animal feed, cement and fertiliser, the demand for 300,000 tons of jute bags, all within the country, can be anticipated but in the long term only. This means that 60 per cent of the present output from the jute mills can be absorbed domestically. Actually this is what happened to the Indian tute industry, thereby isolating it from the adverse influences of fluctuating world demand and

The traditional prescription for expanding use of jute through diversification into manufacture of new products based on jute have very limited validity. Jute-cotton or jutewool are talked about subjects but as business ventures, they are not likely to find investors. Jute is a low grade fibre and best suited as a packaging material. Since alternative synthetic packing materials or bulk loading are indeed much cheaper, there is no point in pursuing the lost case of jute. The whole jute plant, the stem as well as fibres, are also suitable pulp material but it would be too expensive unless only juic cuttings are used which are otherwise thrown away as

it is basically a type of fabric

Jute therefore must proceed the indigo way. It would not totally die away. It can survive but to a small, very limited extent, primarily depending upon domestic demand. A long term programme for restructuring the jute economy should be undertaken and it is not a piecemeal operation of closing down existing mills and reducing the number of workers. A comprehensive programme for integrated development of the jutesubstitute economy is required on a priority basis.

The fertile floodplains of Bangladesh are suttable for varieties of crops and growing of jute is not essential for our agriculture. Similarly, jute industry can be very profitably transformed for manufacture of numerous other textile products. Let us initiate the programming work for this pur-

Instead of the emphasis on downstzing jute industry as the World Bank is insisting, let us think of substitution for greater gains to farmers in fields and workers in mills. It is an ap-

## Reporters Operate in Climate of Fear Prakash Chandra writes from New Delhi all times, on whichever side of

have a different story to tell. A Reuter correspondent, who is a Kashmir journalist, was arrested and detained by the security people for a few days on the charge that he was in touch with the Pakistanis across the border. Other journalists also have been either arrested or interrogated by the

But such incidents are now on the decline. Several local newspapers have closed down as they cannot possibly function in a climate of fear.

The Press Council of India, a watchdog set up by the new government, has warned in a report that the critical importance of information and communication in the complex situation in Kashmir has not been adequately realised by the government and by the media itself. "This is the reason why a media vacuum has been allowed to develop at a most crucial functure."

The Council blames the media and the government for taking a casual and ad hoc approach towards the Kashmir problem. The government has failed to formulate an overall media strategy to ensure the speedy flow of accurate information and win the hearts and minds of people in Jammu and Kashmir.

A bigger blame, according to the Press Council, lies with the armed militants. For, the threat to press freedom in Kashmir comes primarily from the climate of fear the militants have generated.

The Council elaborates this point: "The local press is particularly vulnerable and while any objectionable writing will be actionable under the law, its plight needs to be viewed with

A media vacuum has been allowed to develop at a most crucial juncture

sympathy. Equally, there is need for a better understanding of what constitutes objectionable writing. Criticism of established positions, even if strongly expressed, may be unpalatable without being objectionable."

The Council has expressed a great deal of sympathy for the local and national media in Kashmir which has been functioning in a most uncertain and hazardous environment over the past two years.

"The plight of the local press has been particularly unenviable, even traumatic. The militants are up in arms against the Indian state and socalled "informers" or "collaborators" among the populace. It is in keeping with this line that the first media-related victims of the militants' gun were Lassa Kaul, station director of Srinagar Television Station, and PN Handoo, Assistant Director Information, Jammu Kashmir Government, and thereafter Mohammad Shaban, editor of the daily Al Safa. Others have been threatened

and are under pressure." The media cannot, the Council said, run away from critical situations entailing danger or retreat to safe havens, depending on handouts from any quarter. The people have a right to know and to seek authentic, objective and wherever possible, eyewitness or well-documented information.

Media personnel and espe-

cially those with key responsi bilities for editing, directing, reporting and programming or who are otherwise exposed and vulnerable must receive protection.

There can, however, be no total security and newsmen must be willing to accept the risks that go with their profession. This may require careful selection or replacement or rotation of personnel as the case may be, and full institutional support.

Identity cards and curfew passes must be honoured at all times by security personnel. Even if media persons are to be searched or held for questioning, they must not be hu miliated or ill-treated in any way and their offices must be promptly informed.

Media persons working under hazardous conditions or on perilous assignments should also receive special incentives such as separation and travel

Compensation should be paid in case of death, injury, hospitalisation or loss of property, and employment assistance or pensions should be provided to the next of kin.

Newsmen and newspapers should report all sides and aspects of events fairly and objectively, citing sources, verifying facts, providing necessary contextual background and, where possible, offering their own eyewitness observations, analysis or interpretation

without editorialising. Such professional rigour at the barricades, is proper and more likely than otherwise to ensure personal and institutional safety. There has been an unfortu-

nate polarisation in the media on communal and regional lines which is wholly out of keeping with past tradition. This trend must be reversed through conscious efforts at many levels. A free and objective press cannot flourish in a climate of distrust.

Mere criticism by papers of official policies and attitudes and the fact that some local correspondents write for

cign journals or agencies should be no grounds for sus-The fact that the local press

Pakistani papers or other for-

and local newsmen are under militant pressure must also be kept in mind and their difficulties appreciated.

There is every reason to extend all facilities to the international media to cover developments in Jammu and Kashmir. The bundling out of the foreign press from Srinagar in January 1990 was a mistake.

An open-door policy will pay dividends in winning over international public opinion despite fears of motivated reporting on the part of some.

the past and the hate and look

of the expatriates are eager to

invest in their native land and

help rebuild it from decades of

returning natives remain

sceptical about existing laws

and regulations governing

business transactions. Says

lawyer Hoa Phu Truong, who

now lives in the United States:

"I would like to see concrete

changes such as a comprehen-

sive legal framework to protect

est in Vietnam, some expatri-

ates are hesitant to make the

ire of die-hard militant groups

of the old regime which exert

considerable influence over

the United States and France,

are loyal supporters of former

South Vietnamese President

Nguyen Van Thieu, living in

exile in Britain since 1978 fol-

members of these groups,

were uncovered in the past

few years by the ever-vigilant

South Vietnamese air force pi-

lot hijacked a Vietnam Airlines

plane to dump leaslets urging

people to rebel against the

communist government in

Hanoi. He was arrested when

he landed and sentenced to 20

seized last month for allegedly

conspiring to stage a series of

bombings in Ho Chi Minh. This

followed the arrest of a US-

based Vietnamese at Tan Son

Nhut airport for possession of

and the discovery of caches of

explosives around Ho Chi

Minh. Officials say they were

led by a number of Viet-

namese-Americans already in

tive of the dissidents is not an

rent regime. "They know they

are too small in number and ...

have little support among the

local population," says the

The aim, he says, is to cre-

South cast Asian diplomat.

outright overthrow of the cur-

But analysts say the objec-

This led to other arrests

Some 20 people were also

years in prison.

explosives.

the country.

Last September, a former

government security forces.

A few plots, reportedly by

lowing the fall of Saigon.

The groups, mostly based in

move for fear of provoking the

And despite the keen inter-

Officials in Hanoi say many

But a large number of the

to the future".

war and destruction.

our investment."

the Viet-Khieu.

Depthnews Asia

# Return of the Natives: Boon and Bane to Hanoi

Hanoi goes through a love-hate relationship with Vietnamese expatriates. Yuli Ismartono of IPS reports from Bangkok.

7 IETNAMESE expatriates are proving to be as much of a bane as a boon to the socialist govern-ment in

The government sees them as either potential investors with a wealth of expertise desperately needed to develop the economy, or terrorists bent on destabilising the country.

About the same time that Hanoi was wooing Vietnamese professionals from 24 countries to return and do business in their former homeland, some expatriates were reportedly hatching a plot to bomb Ho Chi Minh City, formerly Saigon.

Officials in Hanot have arrested a number of people accused of plotting a series of bombings in the busy commercial centres of Ho Chi Minh early February.

"Some overseas Vietnamese were able to re-establish contacts with members of the old regime, aiming to create a situation which would discourage foreign presence and foreign investment," says a South-east Asian diplomat in Hanoi.

Meanwhile, the government invited more than 100 Vietnamese living in the United States, Canada, France, Australia and other countries to a recent seminar in Hanoi exposing the attractions of investing and doing business in the country.

The group represented more than two million Vietnamese overseas, known as the 'Viet-Khieu', who fled communism during the 1970s and 1980s and whose financial, technical and managerial skills are in acute shortage in Vietnam.

Hanoi has been actively pursuing economic reforms since 1988, abandoning its initial socialist policies in an effort to lift the country from crushing poverty. But it is hampered by a shortage of an entrepreneurial class and the massive capital needed to get projects going.

Although a few foreign firms - mainly from newly-industrialised countries in Asia like Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea — have begun investing

in Vietnam, transnational giants from Europe and the United States are reluctant to begin operations until Washington lifts its trade embargo on Vietnam. The embargo was imposed in 1975 following the fall of the South Vietnamese gov-

ernment to the north and the subsequent break in diplomatic relations between Hanot and Washington. Victnamese Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet, who pushed eco-

urged expatriates to "forget

ate enough instability and chaos in an effort to deter investors from coming into the country Another observer says this

was their last desperate attempt against the government, because normalisation of the relationship between the United States and Vietnam and the lifting of the economic embargo against Hanoi are just around the corner.

# working for foreign media may

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

### **Population**

Sir, Thanks to Mr Mahbubul Haque Chowdhury DGM, Sonali Bank, Dhaka for his letter under the caption "Alarming" (DS 7.5.93) wherein he has stated that the population of the country will reach 30 crore by the year 2040. He has expressed the genuine anxiety as the how this small country will withstand the burden of this increasing population. It is true that since the independence of the country, a sizeable amount has been spent on family planning, but little success has been achieved.

It is for the authorities to actively consider the question of abandoning the family planning activities in view of the hopelessly poor result achieved during these years. Mr Chowdhury has rightly said that Indonesia had also the same problem, which they successfully tackled. Our failure to contain the growth of population rate has to be seriously examined and responsibility for the poor result has to be fixed and process of accountability applied to secure proper remedy in the matter.

Mr Chowdhury's suggestions (1) married couples to take one child, as per emphasis given by be tried.

Chinese Govt and (2) to gear up population programme activities in rural areas and among slum dwellers of urban areas, which is likely to ensure better results, To my mind a stern warning to the family planning force now

on work with a given period for

them to show tangible result,

otherwise the department may be abolished and the fund thus saved be spent to rear healthy mothers and healthy babies, may otherwise will bring prosperity to the country.

T Ibne Hussain Mirpur, Dhaka

### BPC hotel near ZIA

Sir, The security of the air passengers from abroad to reach their destinations from ZIA is a matter to be thought overseriously in the context particularly after the sun set. A large section of our passengers are from different parts of our country. The extent of their suffering after coming out from the airport in the night was visualized by BTV on 21/5/93 and we read such incidents in the newspapers quite often. So there is a genuine need to have a hotel close to the Airport by BPC exclusively for the passengers. All flights landing after 4 pm shall be given cards for all passengers at the door-step, written both in English and Bengali, assuring them safe and secured stay in a govt BPC hotel. A BPC bus/mini-bus with properly dressed driver and loaders will take them to the hotel in presence of a BPC officer. The rate of night stay, meal and breakfast charges per person shall be clearly written in local currency, US S, UK & etc. The next morning a passenger can conveniently start for his final

versa by those who may fly from ZIA. Some flights take-off after mid-night. Sometimes passengers also get stuck over 2/3 days due to hartal/floods etc.

So the matter is quite important and BPC should take the step as they are supposed to extend best possible services to the passengers. The existing system of BPC is not really good enough and up to the general passengers' expectations.

It must be remembered that overseas passengers are one of the major sources to earn foreign currency for the country and they play a significant role in our national economy. So their safe return to their destinations are to be ensured by the government as far as possi-

Motius Samad Chowdhury. Assistant Manager, Phultola Tea Estate, Sylhet

#### Bangladeshi carrier hauls long Sir, Bangladeshi carrier has

not only survived over the last two decades but has also maintained better than average success records among the air services of similar standing. By commissioning the sec-

ond international airport of her own has this country taken one more step forward toward the wide world of air travels as long as the management remains compatible with traffic fluctua-The setbacks this buddy

carrier with Home-in-the-Air has suffered from discontinued and irregular flights recently owing largely to inadequate facilities must be a learning experience for the experts as far as planning new route network

With only four jets of 200 plus capacity, Bangladeshi airdestination in the natural security of the day time. The same lines is about to go global, as advantage can availed of vice scheduled to land in USA this

year, after already over half-theearth connections in between UK and Japan.

Still a popular gateway to western hemisphere, New York may become stricter challenge to Bangladeshi carrier ranging from seat reservation to parking regulations, but all the encounters may turn the long journey into an adventure to discover America anew should Biman off-route the cross-carrier marketing of the world's giant travel

However, the steady progress of a poor airlines will depend much on the service facilities that are unique or extraordinary enough to attract the estimated passenger volume both flightwise and seasonwise. Moreover, just to stay in the

travel business without loss to the state's treasury, this na tion's airlines should avoid interline competitions of the glamorous trade especially for the sake of the nation's pres-

Zila School Road, Mymensingh.

M Rahman

#### Whither DMC? Sir, Once, a 'corner road

and presently a 'concrete foot-

path' opposite 'New Model Boys and Girls' High School' and 'New Model Degree College', popularly known as the 'North-South Dhanmondi Lake' area, is being used by certain vested quarters as a 'dairy farm' for more than a couple of decades without any hindrance. Does this mean that, that 'corner' does not belong to the City Municipal Corporation and therefore it is nobody's business to keep the area clean for hygienic purposes? Or are the 'city fathers' too busy doing other jobs and remain blind Whose job is it to see that the area is kept free of stinking

A citizen, Dhaka

nomic reforms in Vietnam,