

American Foreign Policy in Asia: Signals of Change

American foreign policy was always considered to be a blend of national interest and idealism. During the four decades of the Cold War the United States conducted the crusade against communism and its chief protagonist, the Soviet Union, in the name of freedom and democracy.

North Korean nuclear ambitions may be worrying but this is not yet viewed as a threat to regional security. The Afghan and Cambodian civil wars are still lingering, though on a reduced scale but the great powers are no longer behind the warring parties.

sea change in the relation between the two countries but highlighted some areas of agreement which has plagued their relations in the past. For example, President Clinton and Prime Minister Rao agreed to offer their strong support for efforts towards non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

Silken Way to Growth

In a despatch from Rajshahi, a correspondent speaks of the declining trend in production of silk yarn and fabric in the country. This does not augur well for plans to spruce up the ailing sericulture sector.

Quoting the Bangladesh Sericulture Board sources, the report says that the output of cocoon which yields raw silk, has come down by nearly one-third over a period of five years. Production of silk yarn and fabric declined by around forty per cent. The silk industry is languishing.

Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia had announced last November that a silk industrial estate would be set up in Rajshahi at a cost of about eight crore taka. She was inaugurating a national conference on development of sericulture held in Rajshahi. The Prime Minister had also said that the government would formulate a pragmatic policy for the silk industry.

Sericulture had largely been neglected in the past. No sustained efforts had evidently been made to realise its full potential. It's time that concrete measures are taken to exploit the opportunities sericulture offers for income and employment generation.

Instead of being pursued as a lone discipline, sericulture should be integrated with other agrosystems. Mulberry is the host plant of silkworm. Programmes for afforestation and agricultural crop diversification should embrace mulberry plantation as well. In addition to supplying its leaves for rearing silkworms, mulberry plant yields a lot of biomass and offers scope for intercropping. Dovetailing of sericulture and other agrosystems could only bring additional benefits to the rural economy.

Silk is the endproduct of sericulture. Starting from mulberry plantation, the follow-up exercise of rearing silkworms, reeling yarn from the cocoons — the process brings direct employment opportunities to the rural population. Silk production ought to form an integral part of the strategy for rural uplift.

Both public and private sectors are engaged in manufacturing silk fabric. The two public sector silk mills at Rajshahi and Thakurgaon have incurred huge losses over the years. Thousands of private sector looms and hundreds of reeling basins remain idle. The alarming situation calls for urgent attention.

The move to create a silk industrial estate at Rajshahi reflects awareness of the government of the need for remedial action. Hopefully, this is not the end of the matter. A lot more need to be done to take the silk industry out of the morass.

Silk is a traditional product which holds possibilities of emerging as a major high-value export item. However, production facilities would have to be upgraded. New technologies may have to be introduced. Quality of product, including colours, designs and the texture of the fabric, would have to be brought up to international standards. New marketing techniques would have to be evolved.

Silk figures among the 'crash programme items' chosen to lead export growth. Yet, a targeted approach towards building up export capability seems to be lacking. In his budget speech, the Finance Minister spoke of the establishment of a new fifty crore taka fund for export development. Silk should receive priority in gaining access to this facility.

Such a Tragic Killing!

Terrorists killed a street vendor, Jaj Mian in broad daylight before the eyes of thousands at Gulistan, most crowded shopping centre in the city, on Thursday. The victim, who dealt in shoes at footpath, was done to death with repeated blows of Chinese axe. The poor shoe vendor had to meet this tragic death reportedly on his refusal to pay toll. This is an incident that cannot fail to reflect on our collective psyche. Those who were in charge of law and order might have their own explanations to offer for such a ghastly public murder, but there is no doubt about the psychological shock it has produced in people's minds.

If the illegal toll collectors can treat the government's law enforcing arm so disdainfully, the first casualty in the process becomes none other than public confidence in the administration. The message of such public murders for both the law enforcement agencies and the public is unmistakable. If the former cannot prove equal to the task of containing such murderous assaults, the terrorists will have a field-day by default. The administration must be prepared to exercise all the powers at its command to take on the culprits and restore confidence in public mind. Such an approach can help us obviate constraints in terms of equipment and gadgets up to a certain point.

In a society where the security of life is so grossly compromised and the terrorists get seldom punished for their heinous crimes, it is only natural that such crimes will breed further crimes. This is exactly what is happening now. The criminal gangs are going from strength to strength and resorting to more and more adventurous and dare-devil acts of crime. Today society's resistance to various crimes — even though those are perpetrated in public and crowded places — is at its lowest. The usual rapport between the law enforcers and the public seems snapped. This is another aspect to the scenario that must be gone into seriously.

True, this culture of violence and toll collection is a legacy of the authoritarian regime which hardly felt to be accountable to the people. But a democratic government, however burdened it may be by the undesirable spill-over of the past, has to prove that it can, under no circumstances, be lax on the issue of law and order.

In this particular case when Jaj Mian was being hacked to death, the members of law enforcing agency reportedly stood by only a few scores of metres away. They could be almost caught in the action. We would like to know what the patrol police are there for. If a group of four or five mas-fans can get away after a murder from under their very nose, their conduct surely comes under scrutiny. It is time that this scrutiny was made not only to get into the heart of this murder case but also other criminal cases routinely cropping up.

The Bangladesh news media did not pay much attention to the crisis that was brewing for several months over the question of renewal of the MFN status for China. The human-rights lobby in the United States, particularly a powerful group in the Congress, has been unhappy with China ever since the Tiananmen incident. It may be recalled that in 1989 the Chinese government crushed with a heavy hand the student agitators who assembled in Beijing's Tiananmen Square to demand democracy and the protection of human rights. A number of these young people were reportedly killed by the Security forces. Cries of dismay and protest rose all over the western world. As a mark of their disapproval of the suppression of the pro-democracy movement, the western nations suspended high level contact with the Chinese authorities. But China was undeterred by these pressures. While the ruling Communist Party encouraged private enterprise and an 'open door' policy in the eco-

conomic field, it did not loosen its grip on political power.

Meanwhile the astonishing success of the country in achieving double digit economic growth startled the rest of the world. The western powers resumed, albeit reluctantly, their contacts with the Chinese government. They continued, however, to raise the issue of human rights from time to time. The US lobby was most vocal in this regard. It is interesting to note that as the volume of Chinese exports to the US increased and the trade balance was tilted in favour of China, (last year China enjoyed a \$23 billion surplus with the US) the American critics of Chinese human rights records became increasingly more vocal and shrill. For example, it was alleged that the Chinese authorities permitted the use of prison labour to produce export goods at virtually no cost for flooding the US markets. Here the human rights activists and the protectionist lobby seemed to be acting in unison. President Clinton, it may be recalled, criticized President Bush during the election campaign when the latter resumed diplomatic and economic relations with China after Tiananmen. In fact, President Clinton had explicitly linked the human rights question with the granting of trading privileges to China. The President was therefore in a quandary when the issue confronted him recently. Should he refuse to renew the MFN status to China and thereby provoke a crisis in Sino-American relations? The US business lobby was strongly opposed to such a move. They saw in China a vast and rich market which offered lucrative and rapidly expanding trade and investment opportunities. If the Americans shut themselves up from this market others such as Japan and the European Union might simply replace them.

The Chinese authorities, on

the other hand, considered the US pressures on the question of human rights as an interference in their domestic affairs. They were not prepared to make any concessions. When secretary of state Warren Christopher visited Beijing to extract some concessions, even some face-saving ones, from the Chinese leaders, he received a cool reception. Evidently the Chinese leaders did not like their American guest to poke his nose in their domestic affairs. He returned from Beijing disillusioned and empty-handed. Indeed the Chinese government refused even to make symbolic gestures to satisfy the

source of concern, no one thinks this to be a problem at this time. North Korean nuclear ambitions may be worrying but this is not yet viewed as a threat to regional security. The Afghan and Cambodian civil wars are still lingering, though on a reduced scale but the great powers are no longer behind the warring parties. Despite some hiccups, the Middle East peace process appears to be making some real progress. In this environment security questions have receded into the background and other issues such as trade, the environment and human rights have taken the centre stage. The US trade imbalance with

Tokyo would fold under pressure. Having failed to obtain numerical targets on trade, Mr Clinton invoked the threat of sanctions, and the negotiations with Japan were broken off. Now, following the relatively narrow agreement reached Tuesday on how to measure access to Japanese markets, the talks are to resume. In all these cases, US policy, though still fragmented, is moving in the right direction.

US policy under Clinton in the sub-continent has also taken a new direction. US tilt in favour of Pakistan, since 1954 when the alliance between them was forged, played a decisive role in shaping the sub-continent's foreign relations. India was drawn towards the Soviet Union as a natural reaction to Pakistan's alliance with the United States. In course of time the Soviet Union became a major supplier of arms to India as well as an important trade partner. The Friendship Treaty, signed in 1971, further cemented this friendship. The Kashmir question was, of course, at the centre of these developments. Both India and Pakistan sought to strengthen themselves in their fight over Kashmir. The Sino-Indian border conflict of 1962 injected a new element into the picture and brought the US somewhat close to India. But the uneasiness in their relations soon returned and during the Nixon-Kissinger years in the White House their relations perhaps reached the coldest point. Nixon's all-out effort to prevent the break-up of Pakistan is now a part of history. The main irritant in their relation during the eighties was the alleged nuclear weapons ambition of India. India was perceived in the US as a Soviet ally which was going nuclear.

Given such a background the joint statement issued on 19 May 1994 after Mr Narasimha Rao's recent visit to the US was a remarkable document. It not only indicated a

ON THE RECORD by Shah AMS Kibria

American humanitarian lobby. Eventually, ignoring the pleas of the humanitarian as well as the protectionist lobby, President Clinton extended the MFN status for China for another year. His decision was hailed by foreign policy professionals as a victory of pragmatism. Writing in the International Herald Tribune on May 30, 1994, William Clark Jr., a former assistant secretary of state for Asia and Pacific Affairs, said "Mr Clinton's decision last week to continue most favoured trading benefits for China and no longer make renewal of these benefits conditional on Beijing's human rights performance was a step in the right direction. There have been others, some less publicized, which suggest that the administration has been rethinking its Asia policy."

Unlike the last four decades when security questions dominated American Asia policy, its central concerns these days are trade issues. The Soviet threat is gone and though a resurgent Russia may become a

Japan has been a source of friction between these two friendly countries. Americans have been seeking greater access to the Japanese market but the Japanese are now reluctant to temper with their domestic market arrangements and to force changes which can only be made at the cost of alienating powerful interest groups. Moreover, times have changed. The Japanese have demonstrated a new-found willingness to say "No" to their American allies. Both Hosokawa and his successor Hata stood their ground when pressure was put on them to set numerical targets for US exports to Japan. The prospect of a trade war between the US and Japan sent shock waves around the world. Fortunately President Clinton has refused to take the plunge into a full fledged trade war. Commenting on this issue Mr William Clark Jr said, "The United States has moved out of reverse gear in its trade talks with Japan. Washington was unyielding in February, working on the assumption that

Nepali Democracy Faces Uncertain Future

Jan Sharma writes from Kathmandu

Ordinary Nepalis seem to be running out of patience with Mr Koirala's government

UNCERTAINTY over the future of Nepal's four-year-old multi-party parliamentary democracy is growing as the Himalayan kingdom appears headed towards a long, hot summer of political unrest.

More political protests and disturbances seem to be on the cards following the apparently successful general strike declared throughout the country early in May by a radical communist group.

Ordinary Nepalis seem to be running out of patience with the dull and allegedly corrupt government of Prime Minister Girija Prasad Koirala. A columnist has described Mr Koirala's three years in office as a "national disgrace."

The recent general strike, which condemned Mr Koirala's rule, resulted in the closure of most shops, particularly in this capital city. Streets were emptied of vehicles; schools and campuses shut down for the day; and business at most banks and public offices was slack.

A spokesman for the Home Ministry said 428 people were arrested and released after questioning by the police.

Clashes between the police and strikers were reported in

Jajarkot, west Nepal which is believed to be a stronghold of the radical United People's Front (UPF). Police reportedly fired shots to disperse some 500 protesters carrying sticks.

Frightened shopkeepers hastily closed down their shops for the day. No casualties were reported.

"It was a total success," boasts Dr Baburam Hattarai, convenor of UPF, of the mass protests. The strike appeared to be particularly successful here where the UPF, Nepal's second largest opposition party, is concentrated although it was met with indifference in some places.

The strike's success in Kathmandu was believed partly due to resentment over a March 27 raid of two private homes in the capital conducted by armed Indian policemen.

During the strike, UPF, which has nine members in the 205-member House of Representatives, the lower house of the Nepali parliament, presented a six-point demand. The party, which espouses the cause of armed revolution and is inspired by the Peruvian Shining Path guerrillas, asked for:

• Public apology by India for

the March 27 raid by Indian police.

• Guarantees that the incident is never repeated.

• An all-party impartial investigation into the raid.

• Repeal of the Tanakpur Treaty with India on sharing of water resources and an end to the "Indianization" of the Nepali society.

• Suspension of hikes in electricity tariff and market prices.

• End to unemployment.

The May 4 strike was only the latest in a series of protest actions. On April 29, the effigies of Mr Koirala and Indian Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao were burnt. The next day, in a mass meeting, speakers charged that the ruling party was conspiring to have Nepal annexed by India.

Amik Sherchan, leader of the UPF parliamentary party, likened Mr Koirala to Kaji Lendup Dorje who played a key role in the Indian annexation of Sikkim in 1974.

While the strike seemed to be politically beneficial to UPF,

it was a political embarrassment for the Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist Leninist or UML), the largest opposition with 68 members in the lower house. The party did not officially support the strike.

UML is currently negotiating with Mr Koirala for certain concessions although there are signs that UML may also launch its own protest programmes if the fragile negotiations do not produce results.

"Dristi," an official weekly of the party, reported that the UML leadership was running out to patience with Mr Koirala who had promised everything but had conceded nothing.

One of UML's key demands is for an independent commission headed by a sitting justice of the Supreme Court to investigate the death of two party leaders in a road "mishap" last year. The commission has not been named yet.

UML insists that its leaders, former general secretary Madhav Kumar Nepal and colleague

Jiva Raj Ashrit, were victims of an assassination plot.

Aside from the communists, the National Democratic Party, dominated by loyalists of the disgraced Panchayat regime, is also planning a series of protests, possibly a national strike on June 2, which would focus on issues of nationalism, economic hardship and lack of security.

Nepal's next general elections are not scheduled until 1997 but an early election cannot be ruled out in view of the growing unpopularity of Mr Koirala.

If the communists are to face the elections as a united group, Mr Koirala would have a lot to worry about. But the prospects of unity within this group seem to be dim as differences appear to be growing not only among the various communist factions but within the separate groups. Dr Bhattarai, for one, says UML is not a Marxist party anymore but a revisionist party moving towards the right.

Within the UPF, which is made up of five different factions, one group believes the time is ripe for an armed revolution while another thinks it is better to wait and see.

On April 19, the UML polit-

buro suspended from party membership for three years three of its members of parliament, for visiting the United States last year against party orders.

UML currently faces a real dilemma. If it becomes a moderate, it would be acceptable to the West but it would lose its revolutionary appeal and may become no more than a carbon copy of the ruling Nepali Congress Party. If it is too radical, like UPF, it would have little hope of presenting itself as an alternative to the ruling party.

A leadership to give UML a clear direction and vision has not yet emerged. Madhav Nepal, the diminutive general secretary of UML, is seeking a formula for collective leadership.

The other political parties in Nepal including the ruling group, are also engaged in a review of their structure strategies and goals.

Results of this self-examination will emerge as the next election draws closer and the disappointing administration of Mr Koirala, elected for a five-year term in May 1991, ends.

—Depthneus Asia

To the Editor...

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.

Kalwala slum in Mirpur

Sir, Dhaka city mayor seems to be very efficient. The city dwellers are having almost regular water supply barring some local and temporary shortage. Students can prepare for their examinations under electric light barring the recent (and temporary) load shedding. Mosquitoes are not so dangerous, as we see everybody is not suffering from malaria. Lanes and streets are dry, except, of course, when it rains cats and dogs. Dustbins are cleaned everyday.

However, I here like to point out, humbly, a different state of a street in Mirpur Section-1. The area is called Kalwala slum. It is located behind ABC Eye Hospital. And here two thousand people walk on spilling drain-water everyday. Innocent children play in the drain-water. Passersby cross the road soaking their feet and shoes in the drain-water (So, they have to wash before reaching their work place or home every time!). Mirpur is proud of its won-

derful national garden and zoo, stadium, martyrs memorial and also serenity.

DMC authorities appear to be sympathetic to the city dwellers. So, I would request the authorities concerned to visit the area and cure the disease called drainage problem of Kalwala area as early as possible. Ditruba Akhtar Choudhury Mirpur, Dhaka.

BAI teachers

Sir, Although Bangladesh Agricultural Institute (BAI) is the country's oldest agricultural institution, still it is running with several academic and administrative problems. Previously we have communicated our problems through the press. I would once again like to mention some peculiar service problems of the teachers of BAI. We won't blame anyone because right from the Minister for Agriculture to the Asstt Secretary of the Ministry on various occasions, have assured us that they were looking in to our problems and

would take necessary action to redress the existing situation. But unfortunately things still remain the same.

The Principal, Professors and Associate Professors are not getting their genuine pay-scales although the two other new agri colleges within the same administration have their genuine pay-scales for their teachers. Recently some teachers of BAI have been promoted to the posts of professors and associate professors but the Ministry has not mentioned the scale of pay in their promotion orders. As a result, the AG office has expressed its inability to issue pay-in-slip to the promotes. Consequently the concerned teachers who got promotion are drawing their pay mostly in their previous pay-scale or in a grade below that of the promoted post. Strangely, although in the structure there is a post of Vice Principal yet no higher pay-scale or special allowance is being given to the person holding the post. On the other hand, who acts as vice-principal in-charge receives a charge-pay as per rule. At present, the appointed Vice Principal is not getting any higher pay-scale or special allowance other than those he used to receive in his previous post, i.e. Professor. But when he was VP in-charge he used to receive a charge pay.

As BAI is under the administrative control of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute

(BARI), the service of the teachers is being governed by the Service Rule of BARI which contains no special provision for regulating the promotion and other related matters of the BAI teachers. As a result, the teachers of BAI as well as those of other two agri colleges are not getting promotion for the last few years. It is said by the authority that since the services of BAI teachers are controlled by the BARI service rules, hence, two types of promotion rules cannot be followed for researchers and teachers respectively. So it is evident that we are strictly governed by the BARI Service Rule. But when the teachers of BAI are approaching the authority for earn leave, it is said that BAI being an educational institution the teachers cannot claim earn leave. In this case the BARI's service rule is being ignored. In reality, the teachers of BAI even during the Ramadan holidays conduct exams and perform other academic duties.

May I draw the kind attention of the relevant authority to the above mentioned problems of BAI teachers and request them to take urgent measures to solve these problems thereby rescuing the teachers from the state of frustration and help them to discharge their pious responsibilities with a peaceful mind.

M Zahidul Haque General Secretary, BAI

In following suit

Sir, To transform Dhaka into a global "commercial hub" will require the "right stuffs" who can develop the Bangladeshi capital into a magnet like "Singapore".

A few Bangladeshis must have a second thought and also a second choice over their native experts, since simply following another successful city may not be wise enough for geographically different Dhaka, as far as Singapore is concerned.

Yet, for Bangladesh, it will be a start-it-all-over-again where British left off before following the footsteps of Singapore, as this South Asian state appears to have mastered how to stay an LDC probably to satisfy Aid Club even at the cost of own resources — human, industrial, and natural.

Whether Indic Bangladesh must follow oriental Singapore in regional planning merits an in-depth study of her socio-cultural background alongwith trends in econo-political characteristics in relation to the fast developing international commercial behaviours.

The most sensitive aspect that will have to be addressed is how to conserve the ethnic values and traditions while marrying modern western economic patterns in an urban planning for a complete self-dependent capital-cum-commercial city having facilities for world level meets such as

UNGA session, Summer Olympics, exposition, among the major components. M Rahman Zila School Road, Mymensingh.

Preservation of vegetables and fruits

Sir, In our country fruits and vegetables become available at a very cheap rate in production seasons. Sometimes producers are forced to sell their produce even at a throwaway price. On the otherhand, in off season prices of these products go extremely high and common consumers often cannot think of buying them. That is, because there is no large scale facilities for preservation of fruits and vegetables.

But in India and Pakistan fruits and vegetables are available in abundance at reasonable price throughout the year. Because they have developed facilities for large scale preservation.

It is advantageous for both consumers as well as producers. Producers can have fair price for their products and consumers can have them at a reasonable price throughout the year. Will the Ministry of Agriculture rise to the occasion and do something to help the innumerable silent producers and consumers of the country? Sak'h Ahmed Choudhury Dhaka Cantonment, Dhaka.