## Clinton Discovers Bangladesh

What could indeed be the attractions of Bangladesh for the United States? asks C. Raja Mohan

HETHER the US President, Mr. Bill Clinton, stops in Pakistan or not, he is certainly going to Bangladesh. But why Bangladesh? What in the world is taking Mr. Clinton to a country that has long been a symbol of human despair?

Although much of the world loes not pay serious attention o Bangladesh, the Clinton Administration has turned a teen eye towards this nation in ecent years. The Clinton visit is not a passing fancy but the product of an assiduous American cultivation of Dhaka over the last few years.

The first ever visit by an American President to Bangladesh could well mark the beginning of a subtle shift in US policy towards the sub-conti-

For the US. South Asia meant just India and Pakistan and their unending rivalries all these years. Although the problems arising out of the tensions between New Delhi and Islamabad would remain at the top of the US agenda for the foreseeable future, there are other countries and issues that are beginning to interest Washing-

What could indeed be the attractions of Bangladesh for the United States? Natural gas for one. Americans have always been good at smelling petroleum, and have now moved in a big way to develop the energy resources of

But American interest goes beyond natural gas. The US sees Bangladesh as an important example of the proposition that Islam and democracy are indeed

There is a growing conviction in Washington that for all its other troubles, as a nation Bangladesh may be on the rise. The US believes Bangladesh could move itself in the next two decades from the ranks of the poorest nations to the status of a middle income country. Some among the Bangladeshi elite have begun to see their nation as the possible "Kuwait" of the sub-continent.

The US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, Mr. Karl Inderfurth, said recently that Bangladesh - through the development of its vast energy resources - could not only transform itself but also become an engine of regional economic cooperation in the subcontinent. "With the right policies in place," Mr. Inderfurth said, Bangladesh "could make a quantum leap forward by developing vast energy resources, particularly in natural gas. Regional cooperation in this area would provide Bangladesh with a huge market ... just across the border in India."

How much natural gas reserves does Bangladesh have? Official estimates put it at about 11 trillion cubic feet.

But the industry assessment is that with further exploration

and development, it could easily rise to 50 to 60 tcf. American companies such as Unocal and Enron, as well as other Western such as Royal Dutch Shell we actively developing the natural gas resources of Bangladesh.

The new American interest in natural gas has given a big surge investments in Bangladesh - from about \$ 20 millions of cumulative investment until 1996 to about \$ 700 millions now. The US estimates that this could easily rise to about \$ three billions in the next few years, if Bangladesh adopts appropriate strategies.

The United States has also been pressing Bangladesh to get over its political reluctance to export natural gas to India. As part of its new "energy partnership" with Bangladesh, the US is assisting Dhaka to make a better assessment of its energy resources and develop the confidence to make the right decisions on making the best use of its natural gas resources. India might find it strange, but the US is asking India's neighbours, for the first time in decade . to join New Delhi in promoting regional energy and economic integration.

The US also believes it can extend this "win-win" strategy to Nepal which has vast underdeveloped hydropower resources that can be developed to xport electricity to an energystarved India. "This will raise Nepal's own standard of living, while linking it productively

with its neighbours". Mr. Inderfurth adds. But returning to Bangladesh its larger political significance

was summed up by Mr. Bill Richardson when he visited Dhaka in April 1998. "Bangladesh is dramatic evidence that Islamic countries can be strong democracies." If the US is in search of "modernising and moderate" Islamic nations, few could match Bangladesh. And this in turn could alter, over the long term, the American pecking or-der in the sub- continent. For years, the US has seen Pakistan as a moderate Islamic state that needs its support. But as Pakistan becomes a breeding ground for extreme forms of Islamic militancy, Bangladesh represents a progressive counter tendency in the sub-

continent. While the American agenda is now a negative one in Pakistan, of preventing it from becoming a failed state, the US policy towards Bangladesh is a positive one of building prosperity and modernity.

While the US agenda of engaging Pakistani military generates deep anxieties in India, Washington's approach to Bangladesh might well open the doors for a new trilateral cooperative effort at building politi cal moderation and economic cooperation within the region.

Courtesy: The Hindu of In-

## For a New Orientation

Former Indian Prime Minister I.K. Gujral feels that it is time a white paper was brought out on the ongoing "strategic discussions" between India and the United States in order to evolve a consensus on and provide clarity to diplomatic and strategic initiatives. He said that the context of President Bill Clinton's visit to India should be used to evolve this clarity and to develop a new

orientation for Indo-U.S. relations. Excerpts from an interview he gave Venkitesh Ramakrishnan of the Frontline of India

Recent events, including the hijacking and India's request to the U.S. to declare Pakistan a terrorist state, have thrown up a new dimension to the strategic equations between India, Pakistan and the U.S. In the context of President Clinton's visit to India, how do you look at these developments?

The point to be kept in mind in respect of bilateral relations today is that there is no such thing as exclusivism. And no nation decides its relations with a third party on the basis of the advice of the second party. It is a well-known fact that the U.S. and Pakistan have been enjoying good relations for a long time. At no stage have they shown any sign of reversing this. From our point of view, the difficulty is that while ten rounds of talks have been held with the U.S., except for a few statements made by some officials the Clinton administration has not exactly spelt out what it is looking for. What are the issues that it wants to address? What is the direction? And what are the parameters specified? There is no clarity on these.

I also do not know how far India has progressed in devising a new orientation to the relationship. When I met President Clinton I urged him to look at the Indo-U.S. relationship in a holistic fashion. The difficulty about the Indo-U.S. relationship in the recent past has been that it is dominated by one issue: the nuclear arms dimension. If the present discussions can give a new orientation to the dialogue and go beyond the singular dimension, that would be welcome. The point is not whether President Clinton comes to India or goes to Pakistan. I think we are placing unnecessary emphasis on this aspect. For 20 years no U.S. President has come here. Still we have survived in the international arena.

During the last round of their talks in London in January, External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh and U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott agreed to set up a Joint Working Group (JWG) on terrorism. What qualitative difference do you think it will make to the present discussions?

Terrorism is a scourge that worries everybody, including America. If India and the U.S. can work together to contain terrorism, it would be a good

thing. On the lack of clarity in the dialogue between India and the U.S., there are well-informed conjectures that point to two possible outcomes. One, India's accession to the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and, two, the waiver of all U.S. sanctions, including technology denial regimes, against India. How do you react to this possibility?

It would be unfair on my part to take sides on hypothetical premises. It would be a mistake to assume that we can persist with the mindset of the Cold War. New world realities are such that any improvement in Indo-U.S. relations will prove useful to both countries. The desirability in improving relations is definitely there.

So the CTBT issue should

not be addressed now?

On the CTBT, there are many questions to be looked into, such as whether it would come out of the U.S. Senate in its original form or in an amended form. A proper response can be made only after looking at all these aspects.

On India's request to the U.S. to declare Pakistan a terrorist state, there is one opinion that this is a departure from the principle of bilateralism that we have adopted with Pakistan in the past. What is your view?

In the contemporary era it is difficult to be one-line-oriented on a particular formation. After all, terrorism is something that is bothering the world And if we have enough evidence to prove Pakistan's complicity in terrorist activities, there is nothing wrong in making this demand. At the same time we should also strive to evolve an international consensus in combating terrorism, especially in the subcontinent. India and Sri Lanka have for long been disturbed by terrorism and now Nepal is getting in to the same league.

But during your prime ministerial tenure you advocated the Gujral Doctrine, which emphasised good neighbourly re-

lations. The Gujral Doctrine emphasised on good neighbourly relations with all our neighbours. Even the Lahore Declaration was a logical conclusion of the process initiated by the Gujral Doctrine. But Pakistan's polity is a complex one. In that complexity one element thought of

Kargil and the same element thought of a coup. This shows that there are elements within Pakistan's polity that do not want to move in a direction that is in the larger interests of

that country too. The U.S. has certain interests in securing access to the Central Asian republics, which are rich in mineral resources. This is one of the reasons why it backed the Taliban militia in its early days. Do you think that this factor has ceased to operate in American geopolitical calculations so that the U.S. may swing to India's side in neighbourhood confronta-

At one stage the U.S. needed the Taliban to pursue its economic and other operations in Central Asia. But the information available now is that it is evolving other options in the region in order to protect and advance its interests. Whether this would be sufficient to make it swing to India's side is a question that would have no definite answer at the moment.

How do you respond to the doctrine of a limited war, propounded by Defence Minister George Fernandes?

A war is a plague whose size cannot be specified. I hope that the Defence Minister's viewpoint is not the viewpoint of the Government as a whole. India has always stood for peace and I am of the opinion that this Government is also generally pursuing that time-tested

By arrangement with Frontline of India.

ical pressures, growing neo-

## Clinton and Confusion

Irfan Husain explains how Pakistan should feel about US President's visit to South Asia

HE news that Bill Clinton will visit India and A Bangiadesh while skipping Pakistan has come like a sting-

ing slap in the face. To be excluded from an American president's first visit to the region in a quarter century is a decision that will no doubt be greeted with disguised disappointment in many quarters, while others will pretend insouciance, and say, "So what? So plenty. Like it or not, Washington is more pivotal than ever before in the global shape of things. Anyone who thinks differently is living in a fool's paradise. Unless we want

to be relegated to the Alghanistan and Rwanda category of failed states, we have to engage the United States constructively. The alternative is to sulk on the sidelines and watch the rest of the world

With the demise of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a unipolar system where the US calls most of the shots, ideological considerations no longer sway decision-makers in Washington. Where earlier the Americans were happy to do business with dictators like Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan and Pinochet in Chile, now they are no longer concerned about a communist threat and therefore use different criteria to decide which countries to support.

Having comprehensively defeated the Soviet Union and buried communism, policymakers in Washington now

seek to establish stability and secure smooth and friction-free global trade. This is aimed at ensuring a continuous expansion of the American economy and the well-being of the American people as well as shareholders in USA, Inc. As multinationals - mostly American merge and expand, they seek new markets as well as cheap raw materials and labour. Anybody threatening the health of the American economy does so at his own peril. Had Saddam Hussein invaded an empty desert instead of oil-rich Kuwait - thus also threatening an even oil-richer Saudi Arabia there would have been no desert Storm and the subse-

quent (and continuing) pounding of the Iraqi people. Many Pakistanis are of the opinion that the American refusal to intervene in South Asia over Kashmir is somehow 'unfair'. While welcoming them to the real world, let me remind them that life itself is grossly unfair. How fair is life for the have-nots of this world? When faced with a larger predator, animals do not ask for justice; they just run. The fact is that Islam and Muslims have a very serious image problem in the West. Some of it is an atavistic response to the stereotypes generated during the Crusades, but the real damage has been done by Muslims themselves during the latter part of the last century. Palestinian militants.

Kashmiri hijackers have all contributed to building a composite picture of hirsute fanatics killing innocent bystanders for distant, incomprehensible

I am not suggesting that these images are necessarily accurate; nevertheless, they have been etched on the retinas of the American public by a mass media that is more concerned about instant sound-bites newspaper sales and television ratings than about accuracy and fairness. Also, we are so consumed by Kashmir that we assume that the issue looms just as large on everybody else's horizon. The reality is that most Americans would be hardpressed to point to Kashmir on a map of the world.

As far as policy-makers at the State Department and the White House are concerned, if a choice has to be made between antagonizing India or Pakistan, obviously the latter will suffer. India is a huge market; tens of thousands of American tourists visit it every year: it has no image problem with the American voter; and now that it has embraced economic liberalization as its guiding mantra, there is no longer an ideological gap between the two countries. Pakistan, by contrast, carries some heavy baggage: we are no longer a democracy; we support the Taliban who are viewed in the West as a fanatical rabble that oppresses' women; we are seen as arming and training Kashmiri guerillas who have

taken to killing innocent civilians as well as kidnapping and killing western tourists; and we have been bullying western businessmen who had invested in Pakistan.

While Clinton's visit would be largely symbolic, it would signal to the world that we are not (yet) a pariah nation. Presidential visits are usually accompanied by a flurry of agreements, and our ravaged economy could do with any boost it can get. On the other hand, if Clinton skips Pakistan on his South Asian junket, our diplomatic isolation would be virtually complete.

But quite apart from ad dressing American concerns, the fact is that all the items on the agenda are things we should be doing because they are good for us, irrespective of Washington's demands. Cracking down on reactionary militias is something that should have been done long ago; signing the CTBT, too, would bring us back into the mainstream of nations without weakening our defence in any way; we need to settle the outstanding problems with foreign investors; and we must distance ourselves from the obscurantist Taliban. And as far as a return to democracy is concerned, this demand is already being made within Pakistan, and will only become louder with time.

> Courtesy: The Dawn of Pakistan.

## India would not like the US to give respectability to Gen. Pervez Musharraf, says K.K. Katyal

INDIA RUNS the risk of converting an American predicament into an embarrassment for itself. The U.S. faces an acute dilemma what Washington has often deover whether or not its

President, Mr. Bill Clinton. in South Asia. should include Pakistan in his South Asian itinerary next month. On the one hand, it Musharraf made out a case for would like to refrain from rewarding a military dictator; on the other, it would not want to shun the people, considered important. This choice is not easy and Washington is trying hard to sort out the intractable matter. India would not like the U.S. to give respectability to Gen. Pervez Musharraf, Pakof his action overthrowing a democratic government. this and says the situation has to improve to enable Mr. Clinton to go to Pakistan. But what will happen if Gen. Musharraf announces cosmetic measures to meet the American demands and the U.S. finds the new environment acceptable? Mr. Clinton would be visiting Pakistan even if there is no material change in the situation. In the process, New Delhi would land itself in an awkward situation, while the U.S. may seek to sell the Pakistan visit on the basis of assurances (which could not but be phoney), apart from justifying it in the light of its national interest. It will not be hard to imagine Islamabad gloating over New Delhi's failure to influence the U.S. decision. India has placed itself in a position where the success of its diplomacy hangs by a thread a U.S. 'no' to Pakistan.

The inclusion of Pakistan would mean a qualitative change in the character of the President's trip. The focus on India-Pakistan problems could be direct and close. Already, the recent developments - Kargil, post-Kargil spurt in militancy in Jammu and the Kashmir and the Indian response, the hijacking of the Indian plane, the "jehadi" campaign in Pakistan. and the military regime's active. support to terrorist outlits have caused alarm in most world capitals. It is inconceiv-

able, therefore, that Mr. Clinton's visits to India and Pakistan will not become an occasion for a major discussion on scribed as a nuclear flashpoint In his oft-quoted interview

Iranian hostage-takers: Tal-

iban holy warriors; and now

to The Hindu last month, Gen. Mr. Clinton's visit: If the President is coming

for bringing a rapprochement between India and Pakistan or bringing peace to the region ... if he is coming to contribute towards lessening of tensions, then I really don't see how this objective can be achieved without going to both India and Pakistan's Chief Executive, because istan. If he is just coming for some economic cooperation. then that is a different issue al-Washington does not dispute together." Reversing the formulation, it means any decision to go to Pakistan would be a sure indication of intent of "bringing rapprochement between India and Pakistan." On the substance of this issue, Mr. Clinton made himself explicit the other day, replying to the presentation of credentials by the new Pakistani ambassador, Ms. Maleeha Lodhi: "The U.S. is prepared to work intensively to see the dialogue between Pakistan and India on all issues resume and intensify. To make progress in this area, the cycle of mistrust and violence must be broken. I am personally committed to do what I can towards this objective."

> form of exhortations - if not pressure - for the resumption of dialogue, New Delhi has avoided doing serious business with the military ruler. How will India meet the pressure on the issue of dialogue and related matters? Because of its preoccupation with keeping Islamabad out of Mr. Clinton's itinerary, it has perhaps not given enough attention to the strategy. Pakistan, on the other hand, was going about it systematically to qualify itself for the Clinton visit. Gen. Musharraf called the Taliban number two to Islamabad to secure an "assurance" from him that ter-

rorist camps in Afghanistan

would be closed down. And the

This is certain to take the

Afghanistan for further discussions. Then there was the announcement, made with fanfare, that a high-level meeting had been called to consider action against terrorism. As regards another issue of concern to the U.S., Islamabad announced the establishment of a "control and command" structure for nuclear weapons. It may make appropriate noises on adherence to the Compre-

military ruler would be going to

hensive Test Ban Treaty and on a return to democracy. India's case is much stronger but it has not got its priorities right. It was all right, up to a point, to show disapproval of the military takeover of Pakistan, but it is not right to rule out for all time any substantive contact with the new regime. Also, there is nothing wrong in India conveying its feelings to Washington, as it weighs the pros and cons of a the Clinton visit to Pakistan. But is it correct to make its stand a major issue? It is primarily a U.S. concern. In 1978, the then President, Mr. Jimmy Carter, came to India but did not to go to Pak-

istan, which had just witnessed

the emergence of a military dic-

tator, Zia-ul- Haq. Even now

Washington made categorical

statements against the coup and

called for early, credible steps

for the return of democracy. If

Washington is satisfied with

something less than this, that is its concern. What India should emphasise is the total unacceptability of terrorism as the means of settling bilateral problems. New Delhi succeeded in getting counter-terrorism inscribed on the agenda of its dialogue with the U.S., which till recently was confined to the issues arising from Pokhran-II. The Joint Working Group, set up during the last round of the Jaswant Singh-Strobe Talbott talks, is getting down to business. A credible advance could help meet New Delhi's concerns and

thus create an atmosphere for

facilitating the government's

job in forging a national con-

sensus on the CTBT which is

Washington's top priority.

However, New Delhi would not

like any linkage established between the Clinton visit and its decision on adherence to the

Why the Presidential visit to

India now? This is Mr. Clinton's last year in White House and, as such, is it good diplomacy to invest in a summit with a lame-duck President? Those making such points obviously put greater weight on personalities and personal factors than on national interest. There were instances — in the reverse direction - when foreign dignitaries came here in the midst of political instability or situations of uncertainty. Germany went ahead with the visit of its President in early 1991 when the fall of the minority government headed by Mr. Chandra Shekhar was widely predicted. What was Bonn's rationale? That "we are dealing with the eternal India." In January 1993, the then British Prime Minister, Mr. John Major, stuck to his India trip (he was the special guest on the Republic Day) even though the country had not recovered from the aftermath of the Ayodhya demolition. The decisions taken during both the visits were of long-term significance, which was not affected by subsequent political changes. In the case of Germany, the appointment of an eminent persons group then added a major dimension to the bilateral relations and in the second case, it became the occasion for the Indo-British Partnership Initiative, a mutually beneficial framework for strengthening economic cooperation.

The White House first mooted the idea of the visit during the initial phase of Mr. Clinton's second term when a comprehensive policy review revealed the need for greater attention to South Asia, India in particular. It was during Mr. I. K. Gujral's tenure as Prime Minister that the proposal was taken up with New Delhi - only to be shelved because of the resignation of his government and the ordering of elections.

Courtesy: The Hindu of India

HEN General Pervez Musharraf stepped in to rule Pakistan as its chief executive in October last year he did it with the righteousness of a saviour and in consonance with the tradition established in the country over last 52 years. The impression carefully crafted that the reluctant general was compelled to take the extreme steps to save the country from utter ruin earned him instant support and sympathy. There had been no action or announcement that could scare the people unduly no martial law, no press censor and not even an immediate state of emergency. Instead he could project for himself a man of compassion within his rugged commando exterior - a devoted family man fond of pet Pekingese, rose garden and take-over gave him happy ex-

Nawaz Sharif's abysmal misrule before the military cuses to seize and cling on to power. Those who raised unhappy noises at the change took barely a fortnight to lead the queue to do 'business as usual' with him. Most importantly the US who mattered most emitted signals which, when placed together and deciphered, meant almost an endorsement of the takeover.

Indeed the West and Pak-4stan's regional allies adopted a wait-and-see attitude till the general unravelled his full hand. They wanted to give Musharraf's military government time to implement reforms and the benefit of doubt over its commitment to return to civilian rule. Even if the pace of progress towards those goals was painstakingly slow the people both at home and outside tried to bear with the ground reality. But since Indo-Pakistan tensions reached a boiling point over Kashmir after the hijacking of an Indian Airlines plane in December by Kashmiri militants the international community got panicked and impatient with Pakistan government's lack of movement both on domestic and foreign policy front.

But the military has its own inherent limitations and could not possibly move beyond certain perimeter and speed limits controlled by myriad dynamics of domestic and international politics. The military rule has no institutionalised approach to adopt and road map to follow. On the contrary, it is a complex and constant exercise



The General in the Labyrinth

Pakistan Chief Executive Pervez Musharraf is faced with riddles that

So far Musharraf did not want to give even a face-saving timeframe for a democratic restoration to make possible a visit to Pakistan by Bill Clinton.

in innovation, ad hocism and expediency through one's individual ingenuity and style. General Musharraf could not be an exception to these rules. Popular support might have come to him in gush but the success in trickle. Since his takeover he did unfurl some obligatory euphemisms, display histrionic talents and patriotic outburst but they became almost the repetition and replay of what his predecessors did. When confronted with hard issues of the polity General Musharraf could not but stumble in the maze of

intricacies of politics. As a result the much vaunted accountability and economic reforms promised at the outset are stalled. The inflation is rising and there is no sign of restructuring collapsed State institutions. The local and foreign investments are still shy and the recovery of defaulted money slow - only five per cent so far. After almost four months in

office what Musharraf could deliver is mere platitude which is no more satisfying Pakistani public primed with high expectations from the military. It is not surprising that his charm offensive is gradually losing its cutting edge. And the patience of Pakistani public is also crack-

At home Musharraf, despite his sincere intentions and an apparently liberal credential is hemmed in by conflicting polit-

fundamentalist groups in the Army and his own opaque approach to the country's dozen plus Islamist militant organisations. His predecessors once propped up Taliban militia to fight in Afghanistan. The same Taliban monster now threatens to devour Pakistan. The Taliban connection which Musharraf is believed to have nurtured for his operations both during and after Kargil war is increasingly becoming his liability. Not only it dents his liberal credential before the West, but also at stake are the resumption of International Monetary Fund and World Bank loans which remain critical for Pakistan's economic revival, and the possibility of visit from US President Bill Clinton who is due in South Asia at the end of March. There are speculations that he could step in Islamabad if Musharraf's government takes strong measures against 'terrorist groups including recently released Maulana Masud Azher, now in Pakistan. Clinton might also be able to persuade India to resume talks with Pakistan if Pakistan clamps down on Harkat.

The choices are indeed difficult for Musharraf.

But the general's choice will be still more difficult on the question of Osama bin Laden whose apprehension the US hopes to secure through the good offices of Pakistan - the most crucial of the three countries having diplomatic relation with Taliban held Afghanistan. Unfortunately for Pakistan there is no Red Army now waiting to march into Afghanistan and turn General Musharraf a friend of America in need.

Therefore a trade-off whether by swapping over bin Laden or clamping down on militants operating in Kashmir from Pakistan - is inevitable.

So far Musharraf did not want to give even a face-saving timeframe for a democratic restoration to make possible a visit to Pakistan by Bill Clinton. But can he withhold decisions on the issues like that of Bin Laden or terrorism at the cost of vital support - even if symbolic - from the world's sole superpower?

Just now the general seems paralysed by indecision

The author is a retired Brigadier of Bangladesh Army.