

JAPAN-CHINA

# Drama in Shenyang

MONZURUL HUQ writes from Tokyo

It all started like a movie drama with a tragic consequence to bring tears in the eyes of spectators. A mother carrying her child trying to rush to the Japanese consulate building in the eastern Chinese town of Shenyang is forcefully downed to the ground by the police and later taken away to a prison van, where from all those actors and actresses disappear from the view. What remains in the memory of viewers is the scene where a mother was crying for help and her helpless child standing completely puzzled, not knowing what role she was supposed to play.

But this small video footage was enough to bring tears to the eyes of Japanese who, after viewing the scene on TV channels, demanded that the government take necessary measures to help those helpless North Koreans trying to run away from the miserable condition at home. But the gradual unfolding of the complete story had more than just the humanitarian aspect of the TV footage. As time passed by, the drama had the real forceful impact of creating a serious diplomatic row between China and Japan in this anniversary year.

As a result, a diplomatic skirmish is now threatening to dampen events to mark the thirtieth anniversary of the restoration of normal relationship between the two nations.

Japanese Consulate General at Shenyang was the location where the dramatic bid for political asylum was staged and filmed to be distributed worldwide as a proof of China's violation of diplomatic norms as well as the plight of North Koreans, who are desperately seeking a way out of the terrible situation back at home. The group was believed to be seeking asylum and eventual immigration to South Korea.

In all there were five characters in the drama. Two men and two women, one of them carrying a three-year-old girl, tried to bypass Chinese police and enter the compound. The men managed to slip the guards and entered the waiting room for visa applicants. The two women and the girl were not fortunate enough and they were caught and detained by the Chinese police guarding the compound. The police later went inside the consulate where from they arrested the two males who apparently made their way

inside the building avoiding police as well as the watchful eyes of the camera crew. This later incident raised question about violation of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic and Consular Relations by the Chinese police, and the Japanese government responded quickly by demanding an explanation and apology from its Chinese counterpart.

The incident took place last Wednesday and on next morning the Japanese vice minister for foreign affairs, Yukio Takeuchi, summoned the Chinese Ambassador to the foreign office in Tokyo and told him that the incident was extremely regrettable. He also informed the ambassador that the Japanese government wanted the five people to be handed over to Japan, and expected a detailed explanation of what had happened at the Consulate General.

China, on its part, tried to defend the police action, and in a statement issued in Beijing on the same day, a Foreign Ministry spokesman said the detention of the people within the compound was carried out to protect the consulate. According to Article 31 of the Convention, the host nation must use all possible means to protect a mission from intruders and damage. The article, however, also mentions that the host nation cannot enter any part of a mission where consular affairs are being conducted without the approval of the head of the mission.

As a result, a deadlock in the respective positions of the two nations concerning the interpretation of the concerned article of the Convention was likely to emerge while both Japan and China declared that they would carry out their own investigation.

Meanwhile, China announced the result of its investigation on Saturday where the government mentioned that the result of the investigation showed that police removed two men from inside the consulate building with the consent of a Japanese vice consul. But Japan quickly dismissed any such suggestion and mentioned that the Chinese police did not have consent of the consulate officials to enter the premises. It should be mentioned that the Consulate General at Shenyang was missing two of its top officials at the time the incident occurred. Consul General, having been called to deal with a plane crash in Dalian, did not return until Friday evening. The second highest official was in Japan on vacation. As a result, junior officials who might

have been lacking experience on crucial diplomatic matters handled the sensitive issue of political asylum and police interference.

The video footage of the incident also supports such an assumption where the vice consul was seen picking up hats belonging to Chinese policemen who entered inside the consulate in pursuit of the asylum seekers and handing them back to the police. He apparently was not aware at the moment that any object left at the location on sovereign soil would have constituted important evidence of intrusion.

The Japanese government rejected the outcome of the Chinese investigation and reiterated Japan's demand that the five be handed over and that China issue an apology for the intrusion. Foreign Minister Yoriko Kawaguchi held an emergency meeting on Saturday after the Chinese released the results of their own investigation. Officials attending the meeting confirmed again that the Japanese Consulate General did not approve police entry to arrest asylum seekers.

A team of Japanese diplomats is now in Shenyang and began a probe to the incident by questioning consulate staff. The government also plans to dispatch Senior Vice Foreign Minister Seiken Sugiura to Beijing to negotiate with the Chinese Foreign Ministry. The negotiations are expected to be difficult as both sides are having contrary views not only about what happened, but also why things happened that way.

Relations between Japan and China have already been damaged to a certain extent by Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi's visit to the controversial Yasukuni shrine last month. The visit offended Chinese sensitivities. The new row surrounding the asylum drama can only deteriorate that relations further if not tackled in time. While it is China's responsibility to ensure that asylum seekers from a third country are given safe passage, Japan also needs to assess the whole situation in a more prudent way so as not to harm crucial bilateral ties with its important neighbors.

Surprisingly, and possibly rightfully, response of the South Korean government to the incident was without any emotional outburst, despite the fact that the actors of the asylum drama apparently decided Seoul as their eventual destination.

CHINA-TAIWAN

# Is reconciliation possible?

RALPH A. COSSA

GEORGE Bernard Shaw once said that Americans and Brits were two peoples separated by the same language. This is an even more apt description when describing the Chinese and Taiwanese. A week of visits to Taiwan and the PRC leaves me once again to marvel at how poorly two peoples who share a common language and heritage understand or communicate with one another.

One case in point: A common complaint on the Mainland is that Taiwan President Chen Shui-bian and other senior ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) leaders deny their "Chineseness." This is only partially true. President Chen refuses to state that he is Chinese, for fear that this would be interpreted as "Chinese citizen," which would then be interpreted as "PRC citizen," which would then be interpreted as accepting Beijing's authority over the 23 million people of Taiwan, something no Taiwanese leader regardless of political affiliation could do.

But, President Chen (referred to by Beijing as the "so-called" president or one of the "Taiwanese authorities") has announced that he would like to visit the home of his ancestors on the Mainland, which sounds pretty much like an admission of his Chineseness to me. Instead of praising this comment and perhaps even extending an invitation, Beijing rejects the visit request as a trick or "insincere" and interprets Chen's cautiousness on the heritage issue as further proof that the DPP is pursuing a policy of "creeping independence." Meanwhile, Taipei sees China's continued insistence on acceptance of a "one China" policy, regardless of definition, as "creeping jurisdiction." The casualty in all this is what is really needed: namely, creeping reconciliation.

If Beijing were interested in the latter, it would challenge Chen to take "yes" for an answer by stating that it welcomes any and all Taiwan residents who would like to visit their ancestral homes to celebrate their common heritage. President Chen could be invited "in his private capacity" \_ a formulation that has allowed for interaction in the past \_ or even as the head of the DPP (a title Chen is about to assume, primarily to bring some order to his highly fractious party).

Some would argue that this may be too dramatic a step for Beijing to take, especially during a period of leadership transition, as Chinese President Jiang Zemin appears ready to hand over his Party Chairmanship (this fall) and Presidency (next spring) to apparent successor and current Vice President Hu Jintao. But the reverse argument could also be made. What better way for Jiang to solidify his place in history than to host Chen in his ancestral home \_ this is the stuff Nobel Prizes are made of.

Another opportunity for creeping

reconciliation centers around Taiwan's efforts to participate in World Health Organization (WHO) activities. Taipei's latest effort, to gain observer status in the WHO's upcoming World Health Assembly in Geneva seems doomed to failure, due to Chinese pressure to keep Taiwan out. But, why? China has been firm in expressing its "three no's" policy: no independence; no "two Chinas" or "one China, one Taiwan"; and no Taiwan membership in international organizations involving sovereign states. But Taiwan is not seeking membership in the WHO as a sovereign state. Instead it is seeking observer status as a "health entity," a formulation that expressly takes China's demands into account (demonstrating a certain amount of insight and political courage on Taipei's part).

Instead of blocking Taiwan's participation (as it is almost certain once again to do), Beijing should nominate Chinese Taipei (the terminology used in other international forums) for observer status as a health entity, as an expression of its deep and genuine concern for the health and well-being of the Chinese people on Taiwan -- Taiwanese officials allege that their exclusion from the WHO prevented them from being adequately prepared to detect and respond to the enterovirus epidemic that struck Taiwan in 1998, causing the death of 80 children and over \$1 billion in economic loss.

Taiwanese participation in WHO activities as a "health entity" would not only be consistent with China's

stated position regarding Taiwanese participation in international organizations, it would actually reinforce it, while also creating a bit of good will in Taiwan toward the Mainland, something which is conspicuously absent today. It would also set no new precedents, since other non-state actors, such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, already enjoy observer status in the WHO. It is also consistent with formulations used to permit Taiwanese participation in other international forums, such as the World Trade Organization (a "customs territory") the Convention on the Conservation and Management of Highly Migratory Fish Stocks (a "fishing entity"), and the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (a "member economy").

Beijing's continued refusal to seek or exploit opportunities for creeping reconciliation suggests that it has adopted a fourth no: no cooperation with the government of Chen Shui-bian, even in cases where such cooperation is consistent with Chinese preconditions and could foster better relations over time.

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MYANMAR

# Another area of unrest?

FRANCESCO SISI

ON August 28 last year, not long before the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States, it was singled out that Afghanistan was the greatest source of instability in the world. Sure enough, a few days later Osama bin Laden launched the boldest ever attack on the US from his Afghan strongholds, and the US responded after a few weeks with a blitzkrieg that annihilated bin Laden's forces and regained control over Afghanistan. While the stability of Central Asia is still open to dispute, US attention is being focused to the west, on Iraq, where 10 years after the Gulf War President Saddam Hussein remains defiant.

His threat is real, especially if seen in connection with the ongoing conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians. But this very conflict could be reason for caution in any move against Iraq. Military success against Saddam is not the main issue, but rather what would happen after that victory. Would the Kurds in the north be reconciled with a new government in Baghdad? Would Iran be tempted to take advantage of the situation, or would Syria? Would the wahhabis in Saudi Arabia, while relieved by the fall of their old

enemy Saddam, not panic at the newly accrued US power in the region? And what would the Palestinians do?

All these questions require both long- and short-term answers, but the most dangerous are the long-term ones, where the odds are fuzziest.

So while the Middle East conflict rages on, the United States seems to be forgetting one of the important lessons of September 11. That attack came from a terrorist group that was based in an area without responsible political control, and was financed by criminal activities, especially drug trafficking.

Taliban-ruled Afghanistan was, as we christened it at the time, a geopolitical black hole, unresponsive to international political pressure and with little or no domestic control over what happened within its own territory. The leaders in Kabul could not be pressured because they held little or no control. Saddam, on the contrary, is in full control of his territory - he may be defiant, but he is ultimately a much easier problem to tackle. In Iraq there is a telephone number to call; in Afghanistan there was none, and that made things immensely more difficult.

Despite the US advance in Central Asia, black holes have not

disappeared. On the contrary: During the past nine months a decrease in exports of heroin from Afghanistan, previously the largest opium-poppo grower of the world, has resulted in a rebound of heroin production in the almost forgotten Golden Triangle. There, if heroin and amphetamines are pooled together, some 60 percent of the world's narcotics are produced.

This generates a huge amount of money to be laundered and invested in activities that, whether clean or dirty, spoil the normal market order of all neighbouring countries, including China, where registered drug addicts amount to some 900,000. The Golden Triangle is a huge black hole that could potentially destabilise the whole of China, as Chinese organised crime seem to control most of the smuggling routes and is keen to affirm its presence against the new pressure coming from the authorities.

A bleak picture of the situation was presented last week in Rome by China's Research Centre for Strategy and Management at a closed-door seminar attended by Europeans and Americans and organised together with Heartland and the National Security Information Centre. There is a way out, Strategy and Management said, as some of the armed forces

of the dozens of minorities in northern Myanmar would be willing to give up planting opium in return for an opportunity for normal economic development. Beijing is also extremely keen on exploring peaceful ways to eradicate drug production from the area as it sees drug money as the main source of easy cash for the triads that operate with growing boldness in China.

The danger of this Myanmar black hole must not be underrated. Thousands of people in the region are armed, and although they have shown no sign of threatening the US, and they have reached a truce with Yangon, the risk of a spillover of violence is constant. Chinese organised crime is hugely dangerous too. Several cities in China are considered unsafe for trips by top officials who allegedly have received death threats by organised criminals. These organisations have been hit by a wave of arrests in the past couple of years - the case of Xiamen and Lai Changxing was just the most notorious one - but dozens of other localities have witnessed bitter battles between Beijing and local criminals, some of them protected by corrupt officials.

Organised crime deals with many things, prostitution, loan sharking, protection money, gam-

bling and drugs. Of these activities the most dangerous and destabilising appears to be drug trafficking, as China was already once weakened and knocked out by a century of opium trade. Therefore the eradication of opium in northern Myanmar seems to be the main effort in this ongoing fight against Chinese triads, which then bring their drugs and crime out of Asia to Europe and the US. It is true that as long as their business is thriving they have no interest in declaring a war, but their corruptive influence is thus even deeper. This is what is most feared in Beijing - the corruption of officials and people not by grey businesses, but by altogether bad businesses. In many ways the polluting influence of northern Myanmar with its drug money is second to none, and certainly not to Iraq, which can't mount an attack on the US on the scale that would be possible with the financial means of the Chinese mafia.

Afghanistan was dangerous because it was a black hole, and so is northern Myanmar. Arguably, despite the pain caused by the raging conflict in the Middle East, on its list of priorities the US should recognise that black holes may be more dangerous than Iraq.

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