

JAPAN-NORTH KOREA

Slowly towards a negotiated settlement

MONZURUL HUQ *in Tokyo*

JAPAN kept a careful eye over the movements as the railway carriage carrying North Korean leader Kim Jong Il moved along the tracks of Russian Far East. The two immediate neighbors of Japan did not enjoy cozy relationship with Tokyo in recent years as a number of unresolved issues are creating stumbling blocks that have been proved difficult to remove. As for Russia there is a growing uneasiness among policymakers in Tokyo that the right moment for grasping the opportunity might have come and gone without allowing Japan to realize its potentiality, as Tokyo was more concerned about getting back the lost territories that do not carry any great significance other than providing a sense of self-satisfaction. In case of North Korea, despite the absence of such looming uneasiness, there is no shortage of obstacles that are difficult to overcome. Japan sees North Korea's missile development program as a direct threat to Tokyo's security interest. A militarily strong North Korea having powerful friendly neighbors on the other sides of country's border is the least that Japan is willing to see. Kim's second railway journey along Russian plains unfortunately had the nature and colorings of something similar to that. It has been variously reported in the media that in Komsomolsk-on-Amur the North Korean leader had indeed visited an aviation plant and a shipyard that produce nuclear submarines before moving over to Valdivostok to join a formal meeting with the Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Ever since the South Korean President Kim Dae Jung initiated his 'Sunshine' policy towards the North, Japan found herself in a difficult situation in deciding what course of action Tokyo had to take on that particular issue. Although there were official announcements welcoming the moves towards reconciliation, Tokyo's uneasiness at the same time was also quite visible. And it was George W. Bush who eventually salvaged Japan from that prolonged dilemma of watching the Koreans coming closer and not finding out what approach to take in the process of Korean reconciliation, as the US president termed North Korea 'axis of evil' along with Iran and Iraq. The US administration's decision to brand North Korea as a terrorist state also helped Japan to sharpen her own criticism of Pyongyang and as a result, a number of issues that seemed to be on way of finding negotiated settlements once again took the shape of confrontational accusations. This ultimately drifted the two sides farther apart from the process of normalization of relations, a trend completely reverse from those

seen in case of North Korea's relationship with her southern neighbor or the European Union.

Amid such an atmosphere full of confusion and mistrust, the two days of recently concluded talks between the officials of North Korean and Japanese Red Cross came as an indication that things might be moving towards a right direction once again. The Red Cross talks was the first of its kind since April and a group of analysts in both Japan and Korea are suggesting that the outcome might even pave the way for the eventual normalization of ties between the two countries. One of the most difficult issue that stands as a barrier between the two nations is the alleged abduction of Japanese nationals. Japan claims that North Korean agents had kidnapped at least 11 Japanese citizens back in 1970s and 1980s and had taken them to North Korea to train them as communist agents. North Korea always denied the allegation and refused even to raise the issue at any bilateral discussion.

But the meeting between Japanese and North Korean Red Cross representatives that ended in North Korean capital on August 19 saw for the first time a softening of Pyongyang's approach over the issue. During the talks Pyongyang confirmed the whereabouts of six missing Japanese nationals and agreed to step up efforts to identify the remaining missing Japanese. Despite the fact that all six women that North Korea informed about had willingly went to that country and none has any connection to the allegedly abducted Japanese nationals, the mentioning of the issue itself by North Korean official is an indication that Pyongyang might eventually soften further its earlier standing and try to find a negotiated solution of the problem.

Taking into consideration the fact that Pyongyang is yet to clarify its position concerning Tokyo's demand to provide detail information about missing nationals, Japan's top most foreign office bureaucrat didn't hesitate to comment that he was not totally satisfied with the outcome of the Red Cross meeting. The administrative vice minister of the Japanese foreign ministry, Yukio Takeuchi, however mentioned that he had taken note of North Korea's remarkably friendly attitude.

The Red Cross talk was immediately followed by governmental discussion also held in Pyongyang earlier this week, where high-level foreign office officials of two countries exchanged opinions on unsettled issues and tried to find a way out to resume bilateral talks on normalization of diplomatic relations. One of the most remarkable aspects that accompanied the meeting was a message sent by the Japanese Prime

Minister Junichiro Koizumi to the North Korean leader Kim Jong Il. Although in his message the Japanese premier strongly urged the North Korean leader to settle allegations over the abduction issue, it was the first time for a Japanese prime minister to send such a message to Mr. Kim using direct governmental channels without going through a third country. At the two-day governmental level meeting that concluded on Monday, both sides initially refused to give ground. Japan insisted that the issue of abducted Japanese nationals be resolved before the two countries normalize diplomatic relations. Tokyo also called on Pyongyang to postpone its missile development programs. The North Korean side, on the other hand, repeated its demand that Japan apologize for its militarist past and provide compensation for its past colonial rule.

But at the end Japan and North Korea agreed to seek progress within a month in resolving pending issues between the two nations. The two sides also agreed that once progress in settling outstanding issues becomes evident, they would take further steps to refine their policies for resuming negotiations on normalizing ties. The Japanese side seems to be satisfied with the outcome as the head of Japanese delegation told reporters after the meeting that although the talks produced no specific solution, Tokyo managed to win concession as North Korea agreed to discuss all pending issues and comprehensively resolve them within a certain time frame.

The problem between Japan and North Korea is a prolonged one that has its origin in Japans colonial rule over Korean peninsula. The Cold War period further drifted the two sides apart as they firmly belonged to the opposite camps. The end of Cold War hostility allowed many former adversaries to bury past rivalry and restart a new chapter in their relations. But the Korean peninsula is yet to see anything closer to that. Despite the 'Sunshine Policy' initiated by the South Korean president, building a new foundation for improved relations between North and South Korea is not an easy task at all as there are many outside elements that have profound impact on inter-Korea relations. Japan's uneasy relationship with North Korea is just one such element. But at the same time, a slow progress in the process of mending fence between Tokyo and Pyongyang is bound to have a deep impact on the shaping of a new regional understanding. At the just concluded official bilateral meeting in Pyongyang, Japanese and North Korean sides at least didn't agree to disagree; and this no doubt is a significant progress

AFGHANISTAN

On the brink of another disaster

The Americans now leave the beatings to Afghan allies, but the CIA are there during the beatings, writes **Robert Fisk**

THE garden was overgrown, the roses scrawny after a day of Kandahar heat, the dust in our eyes, noses, mouth, fingernails. But the message was straightforward. "This is a secret war," the Special Forces man told me. "And this is a dirty war. You don't know what is happening." And of course, we are not supposed to know. In a "war against terror", journalists are supposed to keep silent and rely on the good guys to sort out the bad guys without worrying too much about human rights.

How many human rights did the mass killers of 11 September allow their victims? You are either with us or against us. Whose side are you on? But the man in the garden was worried. He was not an American. He was one of the "coalition allies", as the Americans like to call the patsies who have trotted after them into the Afghan mid-den. "The Americans don't know what to do here now," he went on. "Their morale in Afghanistan is going downhill though there's no problem with the generals running things in Tampa. They're still gung-ho. But here the soldiers know things haven't gone right, that things aren't working. Even their interrogations went wrong". Brutally so, it seems.

In the early weeks of this year, the Americans raided two Afghan villages, killed 10 policemen belonging to the US-supported government of Hamid Karzai and started mistreating the survivors. American reporters in a rare show of mouse-like courage amid the self-censorship of their usual reporting quoted the prisoners as saying they had been beaten by US troops. According to Western officials in Kandahar, the US troops "gave the prisoners a thrashing".

Things have since changed. The American forces in Afghanistan, it seems, now leave the beatings to their Afghan allies, especially members of the so-called Afghan Special Forces, a Washington-supported group of thugs who are based in the former Khad secret police torture centre in Kabul. "It's the Afghan Special Forces who beat the Pashtun prisoners for information now not the Americans," the Western military man told me. "But the CIA are there during the beatings, so the Americans are culpable, they let it happen."

This is just how the Americans began in Vietnam. They went in squeaky clean with advisers, there were some incidents of "termination with extreme prejudice", after which it was the Vietnamese intelligence boys who did the torture. The same with the Russians. When their soldiers poured across the border in 1979, they quickly left it to their Afghan allies in the Parcham and Khad secret police to carry out the "serious" interrogations. And if this is what the Americans are now up to in Afghanistan, what is happening to their prisoners at Guantanamo? Or, for that matter, at Bagram, the airbase north of Kabul to which all prisoners in Kandahar are now sent for investigation if local interrogators believe their captives have more to say.

Of course, it's possible to take a step back from this dark and sinister corner of America's Afghan adventure. In the aftermath of the Taliban's defeat humanitarian workers have achieved some little miracles. Unicef reports 486 female teachers at work in the five south-western provinces of the country with 16,674 girls now at school. Only in Uruzgan, where the Taliban were strongest, has not a single female teacher been employed. UN officials can boast that in these same, poverty-belt provinces, polio has now been almost eradicated.

The UN was fighting polio before the Taliban collapsed, and the drugs whose production the Taliban banned are now back on the market. The poppy fields are growing in Helmand province again, and in Uruzgan local warlords are trying to avoid government control in order to cultivate their own new poppy production centres. In Kabul, where two government ministers have been mur-

dered in seven months, President Karzai is now protected at his own request by American bodyguards. And you don't have to be a political analyst to know what kind of message this sends to Afghans.

Kabul is alive with the kind of rumours that can never be substantiated but that stick in the mind, just as the dust of Kandahar stays in the throat and on the lips of all who go there. "The British forces were right to leave," a British humanitarian worker announced over dinner in Kabul one night. "They realised that the Americans had no real interest in returning this country to law and order. They knew that the Americans were going to fail. So they got out as soon as they could. The Americans say they want peace and stability. So why don't they let Isaf (the international force in Kabul) move into the other big cities of Afghanistan? Why do they let their friendly warlords persecute the rest of the country?"

Far more disturbing are persistent reports from northern Afghanistan of the massacre of thousands of Pashtuns after the slaughter at General Dostum's Qal-i-Jangi fort last November. These mass murders, according to a humanitarian worker I have known for two decades he played a brave role in preventing killings in Lebanon in 1982, went on into December with the full knowledge of the Americans. But the US did nothing about it, any more than they did about the 600 Pakistani prisoners at Shirbagan, some of whom are still dying of starvation and ill-treatment at the hands of their Northern Alliance captors.

"There are mass graves all across the north, and the Americans, who know about this, have said nothing," my old friend said. "The British intelligence people knew this, too. And the British have said nothing."

There are those in Kabul who suspect that the Americans are now in Afghanistan for secondary reasons: to operate in and out of Pakistan, rather than in Afghanistan itself. "They've had plenty of muck-ups in Afghanistan and they could not base thousands of their soldiers in Pakistan," a Western officer in Kabul said. "They're safer here, and now they can go in and out of Pakistan and keep the pressure on Musharraf from here and on the Iranians too."

Last week, The Independent revealed that FBI officers have been seizing Arabs from their homes in Pakistan and bringing them across the border to Afghanistan for interrogation at Bagram.

It was the Special Forces man in the south who saw things a little more globally. "Perhaps the Americans can start withdrawing if there's another war if they go to war in Iraq. But the US can't handle two wars at the same time. They would be overstretched." So to end America's "war against terror" in Afghanistan a war that has left the drug-dealers of the Northern Alliance in disproportionate control of the Afghan government, many al-Qa'ida men on the loose and absolutely no peace in the country we have to have another war in Iraq.

As if the Israeli-Palestine conflict is not enough. But when Donald Rumsfeld, the US Secretary of State, can identify only a "so-called" Israeli-occupied territory on the West Bank the occupation troops there presumably being mistaken by the Pentagon as Swiss or Burmese soldiers there's not much point in taking a reality check in Washington.

The truth is that Afghanistan is on the brink of another disaster. Pakistan is now slipping into the very anarchy of which its opposition warned. And the Palestinian-Israeli war is now out of control. So we really need a war in Iraq, don't we?

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CHINA

Leadership changes in Beijing

C. RAJA MOHAN *in Beijing*

BESIDES an endorsement of the Chinese President, Jiang Zemin's ideas on how to retain the political vitality of the Communist Party of China, the upcoming 16th Congress is also likely to overhaul the leadership in the Party and Government. Until recently it was widely assumed that Mr. Jiang will step down from his three posts as President, Party Chief and head of the Central Military Commission.

The current Vice-President, Hu Jintao, was seen as the designated

successor to Mr. Jiang. The rules say no one can serve more than two terms in the leading organs of the State, which Mr. Jiang has. But there has been some betting in the Western press that Mr. Jiang might hold on to some of his powers after the Party Congress.

Few here can assert with authority on how the finessing of rules and political jugglery will unfold in the coming weeks. This Party Congress was to have seen the retirement of the third generation of Chinese leaders of which Mr. Jiang was considered to be at the core. Any

attempt to accommodate one of them in the future power structures without finding place for the others could indeed be complicated. Acknowledgement of Mr. Jiang's theoretical contribution, in the form of "Three Represents", could indeed be one way of elevating him above the others of his generation.

In an important speech last year, Mr. Jiang had proclaimed that the CPC must represent the new forces of production, advanced culture, and the broad masses of society. Officials here, of course, dismiss all speculation on leadership change.

The 16th Party congress, originally said to have been slated for September, is now likely to be held only towards the end of the year. Three months is a long time in politics, even in China. ***

The "two-term" rule has been one of the important features of China's political modernisation under Deng Xiaoping. This Constitutional norm for positions in the top levels of the State organs has helped bring in a whole new generation of younger leaders to the top.

Today, China is consciously trying to promote those born in the 1950s to top leadership positions and those born in the 1960s to the level of second rung in the leading organs of the Government. Most of the new generation Chinese leaders are well-educated and have at least university degrees.

Deng's efforts to groom the younger generation has led to the rise of leaders like Mr. Hu. Mr. Hu will represent the fourth generation of Chinese leaders to run the nation after the communist revolution in 1949.

The fourth generation is likely to

see increasing number of managers in leadership positions. The first and second generation leaders were born out of revolutionary struggle.

The third were mostly technocrats trained in the Soviet Union in the 1950s. Mr. Jiang for example is an engineer. While Mr. Hu is an engineer by education many of his colleagues are managers and administrators. ***

Additional rooms are being added to the mausoleum of Mao Zedong that stands in the Tiananmen Square at the heart of Beijing. These rooms are expected to display the busts of other Chinese leaders whose contributions are acknowledged by the Party.

These figures include the former Premier Zhou Enlai, the man who built the People's Liberation Army, Zhu De, the former President of China, Li Shaoqi who was disgraced during the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s, and of course, Deng Xiaoping, who has brought modernity and prosperity to China within one generation.

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