

RENEWED US INTEREST IN SOUTH ASIA

Concern for smaller states

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THE newly appointed US Secretary of State, Dr. Condoleezza Rice, has completed her maiden whirlwind world tour that took her to Europe, the Asia Pacific, Middle East and South Asia. The important countries she visited in Asia included China, South Korea, Japan, and India, Pakistan in South Asia.

Ms. Rice's visit to South Africa, which started with her first visit to India has reinvigorated the old arms race with Washington's decision to release the remaining 32 F-16s to Pakistan after decades of blockade. At least Delhi would like others to believe as if that was the reason. However, Ms. Rice offered the same multi-role nuclear capable F-16s and in addition F-18s to India. She also let India know of Mr. Bush's desire to proceed with the Next Step in Strategic Partnership (NSSP), policy that she espoused in her capacity as National Security Adviser. She termed India as a natural strategic partner in South Asia, one being the largest and other being the most powerful democracy in the world.

Delhi now finds that Washington is up to its old trick i.e. appeasing India while pampering Pakistan even at a time, as India puts it, 'Islamabad proved to be proliferators of WMD'. India's concern is Pakistan's status as non-NATO ally that qualifies Islamabad to acquire weapons from EU as well as US for its defence, mainly against Indian aggression.

Though Washington wants to see India as a global power with enough muscle to counter Chinese influence not only in South Africa but also in the Asia Pacific rim, yet its planned supply of sophisticated nuclear delivery system to arch rival Pakistan is viewed in Delhi with lot of scepticism. It is not only F-16 but also sale of P-3 Orion surveillance aircraft and naval weapon system like 'Phalanx', that worries India because of its perceived imbalance of sophistication that would tilt towards Islamabad. Whereas, US' willingness to support India's TMD (Theatre Missile Defence) as hinted by Ms. Rice, apparently did not appease Delhi.

Many within the policy makers' circle in Delhi were infuriated, stating that India hardly needs US' support in acquiring weapons of her need. Point to note that there is huge controversy within India on the issue of acquiring Arrow-2 from

Israel, pending US sanction, and its TMD plane. Nevertheless, Rice's visit took her to Pakistan but perhaps by visiting India first she tried to placate India. Washington attaches importance to Delhi's future role in global geo-politics. Indian analysts, however, suggest that Ms. Rice's visit has triggered off the arms race in the subcontinent even though Delhi has not responded positively towards its arms offer. Delhi now plans to acquire a more advanced multi-role aircraft from EU to replace its old aging fleet, with far more advanced technology than F-16s. Delhi has always preferred to deal with countries willing to transfer technology.

Though Indian analysts talk of renewed arms race accentuated by US tilt towards Islamabad but the fact is that the Indian government had in hand a shopping list worth Rs. 65,000 crore. India's acquisition has been ongoing since it became a nuclear power. Therefore, when India claims that the latest US decision has initiated arms race it seems to be fallacious. But US policy provides tools to make India conditioned to accept huge defence expenditure to achieve enhanced military capability for its power projection to step into the shoes of the erstwhile British Raj.

Many South Asia watchers opined that Delhi over-reacted on the perceived 'power balance tilt'. Rather, they feel strengthening Musharraf's hand provides US with the tools to convince Pakistan on a compromise Kashmir solution. One such luminary, Stephen P. Cohen, a renowned pro-India South Asia security expert says, "This gives us leverage on Musharraf in pushing him in the direction of accommodating over Kashmir and other disputes". Now that war option is no more a plausible option with each holding nuclear arsenal, alternatives to resolve the Kashmir issue is dawning on both sides especially on Pakistani intelligentsia.

Nevertheless, India's rejection of US offer is significant in the sense that Delhi wants to maintain its own identity and not align with the US that would distance Russia an old ally, and China, a power that India would be willing to work with provided its border disputes are settled amicably. Though India uses the China card to bolster its nuclear defence, yet economic ties are strengthening every year. Over the last decade trade relations has strengthened between the two



fastest growing Asian economy. Indo-Chinese trade now stands at 10 billion US dollars.

No doubt that Musharraf has been successful in pursuing Washington to reward him for the unconditional support it provided to the US war on terror and making Afghan election a success using pro-Karzai Pushtun refugees in Pakistani camps. But it is still unclear whether US would insist on Pakistan to have a regular democratic government by 2007. It is also believed that Pakistan has ordered 32 more F-16's with advanced naval equipment worth 1.3 billion

dollars received as grant during Musharraf's last Washington visit. Though Pakistan's president succeeded in getting released the remaining, already paid for F-16's, when his democratically elected predecessor like Ms. Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif failed, it does not make his hold on power very strong.

Whether Ms. Rice's visit has really renewed arms race in the region or not could remain a point of debate to many but South Asia had never remained away from continuous arms race. The arms race between the two rivals has graduated

from conventional to nuclear and continues as an on going process with or without US directly entering into the fray. Whatever way one may put it, the fact is Washington has its own strategic agenda set for South Asia i.e. looking for credible partner to limit Sino-Russian influence.

Though the US has achieved strategic success in Central Asia to a large extent yet Washington needs South Asian linkage. In that context its South Asian agenda is linked with greater Middle East, Pakistan inclusive and Central Asia. Bush's fresh-drawn greater Middle East and Central Asia in fact touches Pakistan's eastern and northwestern boundary. In that Musharraf is being projected as a forward-looking moderate Islamic leader and Pakistan a 'moderate' Muslim country, much in line with Turkey. Pakistan's natural link with Central Asia makes it a more convenient hub for Central Asia's southward opening. Washington would be well poised putting Pakistan on the top of that strategic map while allowing retention of its nuclear power that may not be directed towards Delhi any more. Pakistan's clandestine contact with Israel is significant in new strategic balance.

Musharraf's willingness to accept the newly defined role by US is evident from the fact that Islamabad is reportedly cooperating with US against hard line Iran. To clear Pakistan government's hand in Iran's proliferation, Islamabad has indicated its willingness to send its nuclear centrifuge to IAEA to determine the origin of Iranian centrifuge. Conversely, US is more than willing to let India play its strategic role that it is aiming at i.e. taking care of South and South East Asia and to cooperate with Pakistan to settle outstanding issues. But Delhi remains sceptical of US' ambivalent policy in the region. India would be less willing to play a US proxy against China unless it fails to negotiate with Beijing and settle issues like the border dispute, Tibet and Dalai Lama's status.

Chinese PM Wen Jiabao's recent visit to India is seen as possible thawing process of frozen issues like boundary dispute. It is reported that a recent border talk between India and China was very positive, "close to reaching consensus". Nevertheless, crucial to the settlement would be 43,180 sq. km of Ladakh under Chinese occupation since 1962 and 5,180 sq. km that Pakistan illegally ceded to Beijing in 1963. On the other hand, Beijing continues to claim

some 90,000 sq. km as its territory, out of old NEFA, now mostly in Arunachal Pradesh. According to Beijing, most of the north of Bramhaputra was illegally included within Indian territory by the British colonial power. However vex the problem may be, for larger interest and Chinese support for Indian candidacy in UN Security Council, border issue may be frozen or an agreement on the line of LoC may be accepted pending final settlement. A point may be noted that, though unofficially, there is huge Chinese opposition on the other Asian candidate i.e. Japan, for permanent membership in UNSC. In all probability, Delhi may be willing to a tradeoff with China for better ties between the two Asian giants.

In such a strategic probability the US may find Sino-India an emerging axis. Most analysts of South Asia have not ruled out the probability. The axes may grow stronger should Russia be inclined to work together in Asia Pacific region. Perhaps that is what Ms. Rice would not like to see happening.

India however, has proved to be a strong nut to crack. On the flip side, looking at the Indian scepticism on Ms. Rice's visit and rhetoric thereafter, it could be a ploy to coax US support on Indian claim to be a Security Council member with full veto power. Delhi would not be much interested in anything less than that.

However sceptical one may be with the probable changed geo-strategic scenario that is further complicated by US' ambiguous South Asia policy, one has to accept the geo-strategic reality to identify and adopt one's own course. The geo-strategic realities are, one, there would be no let up in the arms race, though India blames Washington for restarting it. Second the emerging Indo-Pak strategic equation and US' future role in it, and three, the perceived division of geo-strategic 'real estate' between the two South Asian rivals. It is nervous time for smaller South Asian countries like Bangladesh, caught between security concern and economic development.

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India & China: Rivals or Partners?

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THE visit of Chinese premier Wen Jiabao to India is an important step forward for ties between the two Asian rivals. The visit is expected to build on the positive momentum generated by the July 2003 trip to China by India's former prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the first by an Indian prime minister in a decade. The April 9-12 visit, has come at an interesting period as India is increasingly looking at its giant neighbor more as a partner than as a threat, while China is beginning to take New Delhi more seriously. The emphasis of the visit, not surprisingly, will be on trade issues such as opening trade corridors in border areas and improving air links; thorny issues like Tibetan autonomy and the unresolved border disputes will be put on the backburner. For years, Chinese policymakers looked at India with a mix of apathy and suspicion. But as India's economy opens up and it beefs up its armed forces, Beijing is beginning to take notice. Both see an opportunity to help their individual economies by improving trade links that benefit from each others' strengths. But while Chinese and Indian politicians like to emphasize their newfound friendship, there is also a simmering rivalry below the scene. Deep-rooted suspicions about the "real" intention of the other country have not gone away. Many Indian analysts still look at China with a mix of historical grudge and envy. They yearn for the respect that China commands in the West. The two countries are also increasingly locked in a race to secure resources globally, especially oil and gas, to fuel their expanding economies.

India-China Relations are on the Mend For Now: Relations between India and China have been marked by animosity. Since 1962, when India suffered a humiliating defeat in a border war with China, leaders on both sides have looked at each other with suspicion and some amount of disdain. Implicit Chinese support for Islamabad during the 1971 India-Pakistan war further aggravated relations and led the Indians to forge a military alliance with Moscow. China's role in Pakistan's nuclear weapons program is probably the greatest single reason for India's suspicion. In addition, the issue of Indian support for the Tibetan autonomy movement has always annoyed the Chinese leadership. It took nearly a quarter of a century for relations to return to something like normal with the visit of then Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi to China in 1988. Since then, there have been 14 meetings of the joint working group set up to settle the border disputes and numerous joint declarations to affirm friendship and cooperation. The gradual softening of Beijing's claim over the disputed region of Sikkim and India's economic reforms (and thus more trade with China) have prevented relations from worsening. China's strategy to adopt a more neutral stance on the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan has also pleased policymakers in New Delhi.

Status-Quo on Border Issues: In agreements signed during Vajpayee's 2003 visit to China, India, for the first time, referred to Tibet as the Tibet Autonomous Region, China's name for it. At the same time, China tacitly recognised India's claim to the Himachal



Next Steps: At present, both India and China value their independent relationship with the United States more than their bilateral relationship with one another and Jiabao's visit is unlikely to change that. What it is likely to do is reinforce the pragmatic cooperation that India and China have embarked upon. Both India and China would prefer a world order that is more multipolar and takes greater account of their role. This is one of the things that bring them together.

layan State of Sikkim China. Predictably, both countries claimed that their fundamental positions remain unchanged. The border dispute is far from being resolved, however. India claims part of Chinese controlled northern Kashmir, ceded to China by Pakistan, and the remote Aksai Chin area. In turn, China claims large parts of northeastern India. Even while Vajpayee was in China, Chinese military patrols had detained Indian surveillance teams in disputed border areas. The two countries have appointed envoys to settle these unresolved disputes. Neither country's leadership seems in a hurry to withdraw any part of its contested territorial claims. But the mutual policy adjustment is unmistakable and points toward continued slow and pragmatic progress.

Trade is the Driving Force: There is no doubt that trade is the driving force improving relations between India and China. Bilateral trade stood at \$13 billion in 2004. Though that is only 1 percent of China's global trade, it's 9 percent of India's. Indian companies look at China's staggering manufacturing prowess, while Chinese information technology companies want to learn from India's success in the services sector. Bilateral investment flows are small but growing. Indian software and services companies like Tata Consultancy Services have set up a base in China not only to cater to Chinese firms but, more importantly, to the multinationals doing business there. For Chinese firms, India's huge middle-class obviously looks very attractive.

Rivalry on the Open Seas: Trade, and to some extent political relations, between India and China may be

improving, but that by no means suggests that they are not going head to head in other areas. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the ambitious naval plans of the two countries. Both India and China have extensive coastlines and territorial waters and desire to deploy a powerful navy that can protect their maritime interests and stand up to the U.S. presence in Southeast Asia. But as they increase the reach of their navies, some amount of friction is bound to emerge as they overlap. Already, intelligence officials in New Delhi are worried about the increasing Chinese presence in the Bay of Bengal and Indian Ocean. Published reports suggest that China is actively courting Myanmar and the Maldives to set up operations in India's backwaters.

India and China Begin to Flex their Naval Muscles: India, which leased an aircraft carrier (*Admiral Gorshkov*) from Russia last year, is keen on modernizing and expanding its submarine fleet. Indian military strategists also want a submarine-launched ballistic missile capability to increase the reach and flexibility of its nuclear weapons program. The Indian navy is also working to build up its infrastructure such as submarine docks, large shipbuilding facilities, and its pool of technicians who can conduct advanced repair work. These improvements are necessary before it can start deploying its navy over large distances. Indian defense planners have given low billing to the navy over the years and have focused more on a land-based war scenario over Kashmir with Pakistan, its arch nemesis. Naval warfare has played a small role in all the conflicts that India has fought with Pakistan. But as its diplomatic

ambitions increase, India has realized that a powerful navy, comprised of a sizeable number of aircraft carriers, could project power and command respect from neighbors. It can also be an instrument of diplomacy and humanitarian efforts as displayed by the impressive missions conducted by the Indian navy in the wake of the December 2004 Tsunami tragedy in South Asia. Unlike India, China has focused on improving its naval forces for some time now transitioning from Mao's concept of a "land army" to a modern military force capable of deploying its naval ships globally. China sees its future military capabilities as residing almost solely in the People's Liberation Army Navy and most military experts agree that China will make submarines a key element of its defense posture it is working hard at improving its indigenously produced Han- and Xia-class nuclear submarine lines. Chinese military strategists also want to modernize its destroyer flotilla and arm them with sophisticated missiles to counter carrier-based naval fleets such as the one deployed by the United States and perhaps India in the future. Some military analysts, however, suggest that China's preoccupation with Taiwan will prevent it from increasing its presence in the Indian Ocean for the present due to its current resources.

Tussle over Oil: For Indian policymakers, modernizing naval forces serves another purpose: energy security. According to U.S. Department of Energy figures, India already is the world's sixth-largest consumer of energy resources. Its energy consumption will rise to 27.1 quadrillion BTUs by 2025, up from

12.7 in 2000, the largest expected increase in energy use after China. Most of this demand will be met by liquefied natural gas (LNG) and oil imports from the Middle East through oil tankers. A powerful navy will be able to ensure the safety of these convoys in times of conflict with Pakistan or someone else. With plenty of domestic coal reserves but not enough oil and gas reserves, India's policymakers are increasingly looking at alternatives to fill this energy shortfall.

Not surprisingly, energy security is beginning to play an important role in foreign policy deliberations in New Delhi. But India is not the only country that views securing shipping lanes as crucial for ensuring its energy supplies are not interrupted. Over 50 percent of Chinese oil imports also come from the Middle East via the Indian Ocean and 80 percent of all imported oil passes close to India's southern coast through the Straits of Malacca. China naturally wants to have a strong naval presence in the area to ensure the safety of these convoys.

Indian and Chinese oil companies also find themselves increasingly locked in a race to secure energy resources globally. While China has been striking oil deals around the world for some time now, India is a relatively new entrant to the pursuit. But a late entry does not mean lack of ambition, however. In January 2005, India acquired a 20 percent share in the development of Iran's biggest onshore oilfield, South Pars, and it is pursuing other transactions in Sudan and a stake in the controversial Yukos gas and oil assets in Russia, along with China. It is also looking at some oil-rich Latin American countries for opportunities.

Next Steps: At present, both India and China value their independent relationship with the United States more than their bilateral relationship with one another and Jiabao's visit is unlikely to change that. What it is likely to do is reinforce the pragmatic cooperation that India and China have embarked upon. Both India and China would prefer a world order that is more multipolar and takes greater account of their role. This is one of the things that bring them together. They also realize there is much to be gained in cooperating and expanding commerce and trade relations, while keeping the troublesome issue of border disputes on the backburner. Both these countries can also share their experiences in tackling their massive domestic poverty and unemployment problems. An interesting question, however, is whether India and China individually, or with mutual tacit agreement, decide to play spoilsport to Washington's efforts to isolate regimes in Tehran and elsewhere because of their dependence on oil and gas from these countries.

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Niazi and the curry bowl

FARID AHMED BHUIYAN

"Niazi with a plate of chicken tikka" and "Niazi entertaining his guests with unprintable jokes", these two comic pictures of the defeated Pakistani commander were first portrayed by his own staff officer Siddiq Salik. It is said that sometime an anecdote of a man is worth a volume of biography. This saying is well proved by the brief story presented by Rao Farman Ali in his memoir. It is about the voracious appetite of Niazi, he was no less an eater than Nazir Hossain Shah, the heaviest Pakistani general who was about to be captured in the battlefield as he could not overcome the temptation of a sumptuous lunch.

Maj. Gen. Rao Farman Ali was the advisor to the governor of East Pakistan during the Bangladesh Liberation War. He was amongst the Pakistani top brasses who were first flown to the Fort William and later on shifted to the Jabbalpur prisoner's of war camp. He stayed there till the repatriation in April 1974. His memoir, "How Pakistan got Divided" was published in 1992. In this memoir he tells us how the comical gluttony of fellow prisoners forced him to abandon certain food items forever.

There were eight Pakistani senior officers in Jabbalpur prisoner's of war camp; amongst them six were army generals, a rear admiral and an air commodore. They had eight orderlies to serve them. All of them used to live in a single officer's accommodation surrounded by proper barbed wire fences with search lights and watch dogs. As prisoners of war each officer was entitled to have an Other Rank's ration. As there was no provision of breakfast they used to contribute a rupee each from their subsistence allowance daily to buy it. During lunch and dinner all the eight officers used to sit together around the dining table. According to the custom of the service "Tiger Niazi" being the senior most always sat at the head of the table and it was his privilege to help himself first from the dishes. He gladly availed this privilege and every time happily took half of the curry from the bowl and then passed it to the next senior. Embittered Rao Farman Ali informs us his position amongst the "Tiger's companions", "I was sixth in seniority, Niazi would take half of the danga, and by the time it got to me one or two bones only were left. Since then I have become allergic to meat."

Now the story of earlier mentioned Maj. General Nazir Hossain Shah; he was the GOC of 16 Division responsible for the defense of North Bengal. Many of his under commands used to respect him as he was from a "Pir" family of "Chackwal". The records he created in eating will make us respectful even today. It is heard that he used to consume four persons ration at a time. When he came to see Maj. Gen. Lachman Singh during the surrender ceremony, he took a dozen of sweets in a smiling face. During the war Nazir Hossain's convoy was attacked by the Freedom Fighters and Indian Army at Pirganj on 7 December. He came to Rangpur Cantonment to attend a conference with his commanders and was eager to leave immediately for his own headquarters at Natore. It was the Rangpur brigade commander who cooled him down by informing that a sumptuous lunch was being prepared. This lunch delayed his departure and when he reached Pirganj, the Indian Army and the Freedom Fighters were already there. It was beyond the imagination of the Pakistanis that the Indian Army could come to Pirganj so fast. In fact, Indians could not have done it unless our freedom fighters and people of that area guided and helped them.

When the Pakistani convoy came under fire at that time Nazir Hossain's jeep was being driven by Brigadier Tajammul. He immediately braked, jumped out and sprinted away. After reaching a safe distance got a vehicle and returned to Rangpur Cantonment to inform that the general is either captured or dead. This created lot of confusion at Niazi's headquarter

ters in Dhaka, he immediately despatched the Director General of East Pakistan Civil Armed Forces (EPCAF) Maj. Gen. Jamsheed to take over the command of 16 Division but he had to come back to Dhaka as the helicopter pilot could not identify the landing place at night. However, at night the news came to Dhaka that Gen. Nazir Hossain was back.

Nazir Hossain was lucky. When the jeep stopped and Brig. Tajammul sprinted away at that time he also dragged out his heavy body from the jeep and ran towards the nearby sugarcane field. The Indian tank troop commander Lt. Sunder Singh had seen a fat man trying to hide but he did not bother to capture him. He had other serious business to attend; he was ordered to secure Pirganj before last light. Thus tired Nazir Hossain safely remained lying inside the sugarcane field and only got up when it became dark. He found a bearded Musullil (?), who helped him to reach a safe point on the highway by crossing a distance of two miles on foot. There he caught a vehicle and came back to Rangpur Cantonment. In this attack Freedom fighters led by Hamidul Hussain Tareque took part with the Indian Army. They captured two Pakistani soldiers, one of them was the runner of Nazir Hossain and he was carrying the GOC's marked map. All the Pakistani deployments in North-Bengal were marked on that map. Hamidul Hossain Tareque was later on awarded Bir Bikram (B.B.) for his exploits (he later on joined Bangladesh Army and retired as a Major). Nazir Hossain remained detached from his headquarters during the three most crucial days of the war and could go back only on the night of 9 December by a helicopter. Such was the price paid by him for that sumptuous lunch at Rangpur.

In Jabbalpur prisoner's of war camp the legendary Nazir Hossain definitely was in a better condition than Rao Farman Ali since his position in the dining table was nearer to "Tiger Niazi". Although Rao Farman Ali has not mentioned anything about Nazir Hossain in this regard but he was definitely in his mind when he wrote, "We found that most of the Indian officers were thin and lean. It transpired during discussion that after the 1962 debacle against China the Indian Government had established a very strict disciplinary regime for the officer class: simple living and very high standard of fitness. Their recommendations had been effectively enforced. In our case commission reports are not even published so no remedial measures are taken."

Field Marshal Montgomery defeated the legendary German Field Marshal Rommel in the battle of "El-Alamein". While commanding the 8th Army Montgomery made it a practice not to accept hospitality from any of his subordinates. If necessity arose during a visit, he used to take an austere sandwich and lemonade usually sitting in his car. These plain meals were always carried with him. This was part of his conscious showmanship in promoting his image mainly to the under-command troops (in fact he was under strict dietary restrictions for a gall bladder stone). He even did not break this routine while accompanying Prime Minister Churchill to a field tour. They were visiting the New-Zealander formation at "El-Alamein" and a lunch was arranged by the formation commander. There, the Prime Minister had his lunch inside the mess tent but Montgomery as usual took his routine lunch sitting in the car parked outside the mess premises. Churchill took this extraordinary incident sportingly and mentioned it in his memoir. Niazi and Nazir Hossain considered themselves no less than Montgomery but the above story reveals what they really were and sometime a story is like water, when heated for bath it carries messages from the fire to the bather's skin.

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