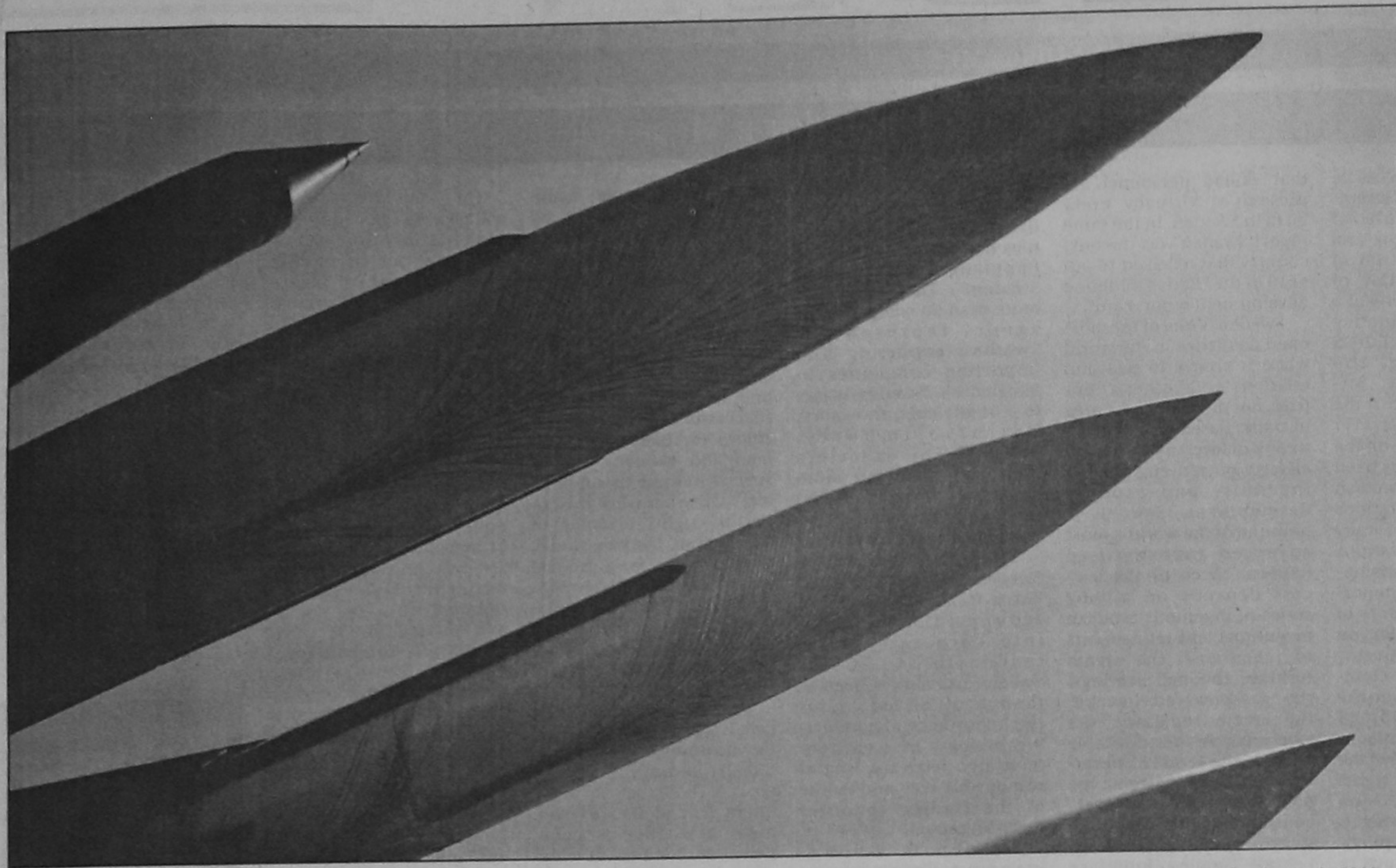


North Korea's defiance: its implications



BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

NORTH Korea demonstrated its anger towards the US and neighbouring countries by conducting a nuclear test on 25th May for the second time. On 29th May 2009, North Korea fired a ground to air missile which has an estimated range of 260 kilometres.

The North Korea's Korean Central News Agency said the test was conducted as part of the measures to bolster up its nuclear deterrent for self-defence in every way. The UN Security Council condemned the nuclear test.

This was the second such test and said to be much more powerful than the first. The confirmation came little more than an hour after the US Geological

Survey reported a magnitude 4.7 seismic disturbance at the site of North Korea's first nuclear test in October 2006.

The modern nuclear weapon is not just a product of physics, but of decades of design work and full-scale nuclear testing. It combines expertise not just in nuclear physics, but materials science, rocketry, missile guidance and the like. A nuclear device does not come easy. A nuclear weapon is one of the most advanced syntheses of complex technologies ever achieved by human beings.

Nuclear arms are better understood as an insurance policy, one that no potential aggressor has any intention of steering afoot of. Without practical military or political use, they remain

held in reserve -- where in all likelihood they will remain for the foreseeable future.

Details continue to emerge through the analysis of seismographic and other data, and speculation about the precise nature of the atomic device that Pyongyang may now possess carries on, making this a good moment to examine the reasons for conducting such tests.

The Bush administration concluded a deal with North Korea. On March 17, 2007, North Korea told delegates at international nuclear talks that it is preparing to shut down its main nuclear facility-Yongbyon plutonium plant. The agreement was reached following a series of six-party talks involving North Korea, South Korea, China, Russia,

Japan, and the US that began in 2003.

According to the agreement, a list of its nuclear programs will be submitted and the nuclear facility will be disabled in exchange for fuel aid and normalisation talks with the US and Japan.

This had been delayed from April due to a dispute with the United States on freezing North Korea's account in Macao. But on July 14, International Atomic Energy Agency inspectors confirm the shutdown of North Korea's Yongbyon nuclear reactor.

Later the US was not satisfied with North Korea's response whether it had closed all the nuclear plants. Accordingly \$500,000 worth heavy fuel was not delivered to North Korea as per agreement. North Korea took a tough stance and on April 25, 2009 resumed

the operation of Yongbyon nuclear plant.

Many analysts believe that North Korea conducts nuclear tests and fires missiles for a number of purposes and some of them deserve mentioning below:

i. As a kind of shop window for its military prowess, allowing it to boost sales of its nuclear technology to other countries.

ii. After having built nuclear weapons, North Korea wants to demonstrate that it has the ability to deliver the warheads for a long distance with a fair amount of accuracy as well as its ability to proliferate such technology.

iii. North Korea wants to show to the international community that it needs to be counted as one of the key states for peace in the Far East by demonstrating its ability to conduct nuclear tests, launch missiles and multi-stage rockets for a satellite.

On 29th May North Korea stated that it would take "further self-defence measures" if the UN Security Council would impose penalties for its recent nuclear test. North Korea's Foreign Ministry reportedly did not specify what "self-defence" the country might take in response to the UN action. But in recent weeks, it has said it would regard any Security Council sanctions as a "declaration of war" and would conduct additional nuclear and missile tests.

The statement called the Security Council's permanent members "hypocrites" who own most of the world's nuclear arms but want "small countries" like North Korea not to have nuclear bombs but to "obey big countries".

The right wing government of South Korea led by President Lee Myung-bak came to power in February 2008 and its policy towards North Korea has worsened the situation in the Korean peninsula.

The "sunshine policy" of previous governments led by Democratic Party has been abandoned and dialogue between the two Koreas has totally stopped. Furthermore, supporters of President Roh who committed suicide blame President

Lee for his suicide on 23rd May 2009. With the death of former President Roh, President Lee faces the difficult task of uniting his people towards North Korea.

There appears to be a conviction in Washington that present strategy pursued by the West does not deter North Korea in the pursuit of nuclear status. Beijing has traditionally tolerated the erratic behaviour of North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-il: worrying more about a collapse of his government than about his nuclear ambitions. The reason is that if Kim's government falls, hardliner military generals of North Korea would take over and the consequences could be more calamitous.

Washington is reportedly seeking cooperation from China in a global effort to disrupt the flow of money to North Korea. Some of that money is thought to be held in Chinese-owned banks, making such an effort diplomatically sensitive. The US Deputy Secretary of State James B. Steinberg might discuss soon the matter with the Chinese.

President Obama confronts a different set of calculations than President Bush or President Clinton faced. Both the Presidents wanted North Korea a non-nuclear state but Pyongyang's attitude seems to have changed because it is determined to remain a nuclear weapon state. Brent Scowcroft, a national security adviser to President Ford reportedly said that "We now have a new situation that has not appeared before."

Political observers say that the genuine concerns of North Korea must be addressed by the neighbouring powers and North Korea must be on board to stabilise the Korean peninsula. Pragmatism and dialogue must guide the policy of the US and neighbouring countries toward nuclear-weapons state of North Korea. Some say the more criticisms the neighbouring countries make, the more defiant North Korea will be.

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US change of policy on Iran

VIDISHA SHUKLA

US President Barack Obama has offered the beginning of a new engagement to the US' traditional enemies, exemplified by its seriousness towards Iran. Even though Obama has declared his opposition to the Iranian nuclear programme, like the Bush administration, he has also indicated a more pliable approach to it. Obama has appealed to the leaders of Iran and expressed his administration's commitment "to pursue constructive ties between the US, Iran and the international community."

Is Washington changing its policy towards Iran fundamentally and does this imply detraction from the policies of the former administration which described Iran as one of the "axis of evil"? What strategy will Obama adopt? If the US is willing to change its policy towards Iran, what implications will it hold for India? Will it also lead to a change in India's policy towards Iran?

Relations between Iran and the US have been strained over Iran's nuclear programme. As Obama said in his Prague speech, the threat of global nuclear war has gone down, but the risk of a nuclear attack has increased, because more nations are acquiring these weapons. Obama has vowed to pursue nuclear disarmament starting with Iran. He has adopted a new approach of negotiating with Iran and this is a welcome development quite different from the previous administration's policies. However, its success will depend to a large extent on Iran's reaction.

Obama has set a time limit till the end of the year to determine whether Washington's attempts at dialogue with Iran have worked or not. Meanwhile, the Iranian President, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, has shown some willingness to engage with the US, provided it is based on "mutual respect." Obama has appointed Dennis Ross, former negotiator for the US in the Arab-Israeli peace talks, as his point-man for Iran in a move that shows Iran's importance in his agenda. Therefore, if the US changes its policy towards Iran in the future, it will definitely have an impact on other countries, including India, which is a strategic partner of the US.

As a major power in the region, India is very concerned about Iran's nuclear ambitions and believes that the acquisition of uranium enrichment capability by Iran may propel it further to develop nuclear warheads in the future. Iran may well pass on this tech-

nology to terrorist groups. This would likely encourage Saudi Arabia too to acquire nuclear weapons. All this will add to instability in an already unstable neighbourhood and might start a nuclear arms race in the region.

On national security considerations, therefore, India is opposed to Iran's nuclear programme and also voted against Iran in the IAEA. The Indian delegation was one of the twenty-two, which voted against Iran out of a total of thirty-five. Highlighting India's security concerns arising from proliferation activities, the Indian Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh said that India did not want one more nuclear power in the neighbourhood.

However, it is also a fact that voting against Iran is like going against one's friend and could be harmful for India's energy security. Iran is a big supplier of oil and natural gas to India. The IPI (Iran-Pakistan-India) pipeline project, which has been signed by Iran and Pakistan, is in progress but the vote against Iran was a major setback to it. Natural gas is crucial for India's energy security as it fulfills India's present needs, as opposed to Washington's assistance on nuclear energy, through the "123 Agreement" which India will reap efficiently only several years from now. Despite New Delhi's vote against Iran, India also wants to strengthen its ties with Iran. Considering the economic profitability of the IPI project, the Indian government is continuing to explore options for natural gas from Iran.

India definitely supports the right of any country to develop civilian nuclear technology but it opposes Iran because of the many instances of illegal acquisition and proliferation. As a signatory to the NPT, Iran has the legal right to develop the technology for peaceful purposes concurrent with its international commitments and obligations. Iran is a signatory of the Additional Protocols of the IAEA but its failure to comply has been very disappointing. If Iran's claims of developing a nuclear programme for civilian purposes are true then there is no rational reason to pursue such a programme secretly, since the IAEA encourages and assists peaceful nuclear programmes.

A change in Iran's approach would do more in this regard than anyone else's changed approach or policy change. Iran must adhere to its commitments under international treaties and instruments and furthermore must be transparent in fulfilling these commitments.

Source: IPCS, New Delhi.

Will "alter-egos" serve our interests better?

M. SERAJUL ISLAM

AN air of despondency is prevailing among our professional diplomats because of the way this Government is appointing ambassadors and high commissioners. All these appointments have not yet been announced because the respective governments have not yet given the agreements. But then secrecy has never been a strong point in our governance and hence most of these appointments have found their way to the press. In fact, a member of the parliament, who is also a former career diplomat, has responded to these appointments in the media as if they have been announced already.

These appointments have been made in a sharp departure from the past. Under the existing system, the majority of appointments of ambassadors/high commissioners are made from the professional cadre who are also posted to most of the important missions, if not all. The system also allows a number of ambassadors to be appointed from the other services - the armed forces - to less important stations on a 70% career and 30% non-career quotas. In the days of President Ershad, who held the career diplomats in contempt, many from the armed forces were given key missions much to the disgust and agony of the career diplomats.

Once elected government returned in 1991, rationality was restored to the system of appointment of ambassadors and high commissioner with minor deviations. A foreign secretary was again posted to one of the key stations: to Washington or to New York. Career diplomats were sent to head our missions in London, New Delhi, Beijing, Tokyo, Geneva, and Brussels. The logic and rationale behind sending career diplomats to key stations evolves from the fact that diplomacy is a specialized profession where the more experience one acquires, the better he/she serves his/her country. This is why all countries have a cadre of professional diplomats who eventually serve their countries at the Ambassadorial level.

Bangladesh has been served well over the years by its professional diplomats. In the early years of our independence, the Foreign Ministry was at the centre of governance as

Bangladesh started its journey as an independent country. In those days, the Foreign Ministry was consulted by the Prime Minister's Office or Bangabhaban and its senior officers were often called to Bangabhaban to brief Bangabandhu. Over the years, MFA gradually got detached from the centre of power, a detachment to which the civil service had a great deal to contribute but they kept their professionalism and their ability to represent Bangladesh's interests abroad successfully.

During BNP's second stint in office, Washington and London were given to non-career diplomats but the cadre officers were still at the other key posts like New York, Geneva, Berlin, Beijing, Brussels, Moscow, New Delhi, Riyadh and Tokyo. At present only New York, Beijing and Tokyo are with cadre officers. In case of the last two stations, the career diplomats there will retire within the next few months. In the trend being set, career diplomats cannot be confident that these posts will be given to them.

Quite naturally Foreign Service cadre officers and former diplomats are concerned at the trend of sidelining the career diplomats. In support of this trend, the former career diplomat and now a Member of Parliament and some Ambassadors close to the Government have said that receiving countries give importance to Ambassadors who are close to "top government leaders." The Member of Parliament went a step forward in upholding the trend, mentioning to the media: "Our ambassadors and high commissioners must act as alter egos of the head of the government. Those people (persons made heads of missions) must reflect the state policy and programme to get better access to their designated destinations." While I have problem with both the views, I am at a loss for words on the opinion of the Member of Parliament. He is propagating a new theory in diplomacy although in the historical context, this theory is an old one that has become obsolete many centuries ago. His theory of Ambassadors as "alter egos" of the Head of State/Government resonates in diplomacy of all ancient civilizations, most of all in ancient India in Kautilya who described the duties of an envoy as: "sending information to his king, ensuring maintenance of the

terms of a treaty, upholding his king's honour, ... suborning the kinsmen of the enemy to his own king's side, acquiring clandestinely gems and other valuable material for his own king..." etc, etc. For retired career Ambassadors who have not been "alter egos" while serving as a head of mission, the concept raises a basic question. Have we, the career Ambassadors, then have been unsuccessful Ambassadors?

One country that appoints a large number of non-career Ambassadors as an exception is the United States of America where President Bush appointed 36% of Ambassadors from non-career background compared to 29% under President Clinton. The US system will of course not be a good example to discuss the subject for two reasons. First, the US system uses Ambassadorial appointments for distribution of spoils where the President gives such appointments to financial contributors to the party, to friends, to persons of special abilities, etc. Second, the US Department of State runs a cadre of professional diplomats who are the best in the profession. The system can thus afford a non-career Ambassador as he/she can count on highly capable career diplomats to support him/her. Traditionally, the US sent non-career Ambassadors to the United Kingdom. In fact, in the long list of US Ambassadors to the United Kingdom starting with Joseph Kennedy during the Second World War till Ambassador Robert Tuttle (2005-09), almost all were non-career ambassadors. In the same period, almost all British Ambassadors to Washington were career diplomats. If one is looking for a reason here, it is in the way US political parties distribute benefits as "spoils" on winning the White House; there is no issue of "alter ego" here.

In Japan, India and in most countries, Ambassadors are drawn largely from career diplomats; non-career Ambassadors are appointed only in exceptional cases. As for the expectation that non-career Bangladeshi Ambassadors will be treated better by receiving countries on the assumption they are close to top leaders, I am afraid this is utterly misplaced. As a Director in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the Ershad era, I heard an Egyptian Assistant Foreign Minister bluntly tell the Foreign Secretary to stop sending

non-career Ambassadors to Egypt if Bangladesh wanted to improve bilateral relations. During this period, Japan too expressed dissatisfaction with our policy of sending "alter egos" of the President as Ambassadors to Tokyo.

In the present context, I would not disagree with the Government sending a few close to the Prime Minister to some important stations. The choice of a former diplomat for New Delhi is a good one. He is close to the Prime Minister and an excellent diplomat with past experience in New Delhi. At a time when we can make a major breakthrough in Bangladesh-India relations, it is indeed a wise choice. The same can be said of one or two others. But to suggest that this should be the pattern for all the key stations is both illogical and irrational for a number of reasons. First, it rejects that diplomacy is a profession that needs training, skill and experience. Second, it suggests that non-diplomats are better Ambassadors than career diplomats. Third, it will serve as a death blow to the diplomatic cadre in Bangladesh by totally destroying its morale. There is also another issue with these appointments. A number of these individuals are dual nationals and have settled abroad. Ambassadors are not ordinary individuals and whether one with dual allegiance can be an Ambassador or not is a serious matter.

I feel sorry that some former diplomats have spoken on this subject the way they have. It is sad that logic and reason apart, they have not cared to consider the legitimate hopes and aspirations of those they have left to lead the Ministry. From what one hears, there is no place for even the Foreign Secretary to go to a key station in this "new system"! As a retired career diplomat, I am sad beyond words and would just hope and pray that those taking the decisions would review this policy.

The writer is a former Ambassador to Japan and Director, Centre for Foreign Affairs Studies.