

## PRIME MINISTER'S FOREIGN POLICY INITIATIVES

## A strong foreign ministry required

Bangladesh's future depends to a great extent on its external trade, manpower export and FDI for which a good image for the country is absolutely indispensable. In order to assist the Prime Minister to successfully carry out her foreign affairs initiatives and create a positive image for the country; it is equally indispensable that she should have the most professional institutional support for preparing for these visits and for follow up action after these visits.

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In her present term in office, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina has taken a number of initiatives in foreign affairs that have earned Bangladesh international recognition. Her visit to New York in October; to the Climate Conference in Copenhagen in November and her official visit to India in January this year have all brought good results for Bangladesh. Her stand against terrorism during her visit to India and later at the SAARC Summit in Thimpu has attracted positive attention towards Bangladesh.

The Prime Minister has a definite focus on foreign affairs. In her last term also, she had a busy time in dealing with matters of foreign affairs and achieved successes. Notably, in that term she achieved sharing of the waters of the Ganges and the accord on Chittagong Hill Tracts. In this term, she has been giving more attention to international affairs. Apart from some very important bilateral and multilateral visits she has already made yielding good results, she is currently on a trip to South Korea and Malaysia to address in both the capitals multilateral gatherings as a leader of the developing world. The invitation to address the ESCAP Session in Seoul has been extended to the Prime

Minister in recognition of her leadership of the developing world in her second term in office.

The Prime Minister's initiatives in foreign affairs will just not strengthen Bangladesh's relations with the outside world; it could more importantly assist Bangladesh in removing the negative image that the country has suffered as a result of negative politics at home. Bangladesh's future depends to a great extent on its external trade, manpower export and FDI for which a good image for the country is absolutely indispensable. In order to assist the Prime Minister to successfully carry out her foreign affairs initiatives and create a positive image for the country; it is equally indispensable that she should have the most professional institutional support for preparing for these visits and for follow up action after these visits. Unfortunately, in this important context there is something seriously amiss in Bangladesh. The institutional support for the Prime Minister's initiatives should be coming from the Foreign Ministry as it is the constitutionally designated Ministry for this purpose. From what appears in print, the Foreign Ministry is being weakened, instead of being strengthened at this critical juncture where, in addition, due to the impact

of globalization, the Foreign Ministry worldwide is now a major hub of the government's activities. Instead in Bangladesh, the Prime Minister is depending upon individual support and that too, outside the Foreign Ministry for carrying out her major foreign policy initiatives.

Following the Prime Minister's visit to India, her Economic Adviser has been entrusted the task of expediting the implementation of the decisions and expression of intent reached during the visit in the Joint Communiqué. The Economic Adviser has been doing the coordination function and most recently, he also visited India for the purpose. While a few issues in the JC are economic in nature, the rest are complex matters of foreign affairs and diplomacy. Then there is also the fact that the issues can be driven home over a time frame where an individual even of the stature of the Economic Adviser alone can only play an advisory role and very little more. In other words, for implementing the JC, the approach has to be institutional where there is no scope of looking beyond the Foreign Ministry to carry out this task. The Adviser's brilliance and competence alone cannot deliver the task imposed upon him. A head of state/government can and often does use individuals for specific foreign policy tasks. The task given to the Adviser is qualitatively different; one that can and should be carried out by a Foreign Minister and a Foreign Ministry.

The decision to entrust this task upon the Economic Adviser could also be a hint of a lack of confidence upon the Foreign Ministry. Insiders in the Foreign Ministry cannot think that another Ministry, let alone an individual, would be given the task to deal with issues that are expected to set new directions for Bangladesh's relations with India. To career diplomats,



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India is their major foreign policy pre-occupation. To take away the coordination function of an extremely important visit to India and give it to an Adviser of the Prime Minister not connected with the Foreign Ministry does not enhance the standing of the Foreign Ministry in the public eye especially when the Foreign Minister in September last year had set the agenda and the tone of the Prime Minister's visit during her official visit to India and was by the Prime Minister's side during the latter's state visit to New Delhi. In addition, the High Commissioner in India is one of Bangladesh's ablest diplomats who enjoys the rank of a State Minister. The follow-up action on the Prime Minister's

India visit should have been given to them for the obvious reasons.

This government started many by placing an inexperienced politician in charge of the Foreign Ministry with another inexperienced politician as her deputy who was later shifted to another Ministry without replacement. The Foreign Service cadre officers are at the core of any Foreign Ministry for success of a country's foreign policy. This Government also started by sending the wrong signals to the cadre officers; that it cannot depend upon them for running important missions. Most recently, it took away the Foreign Ministry's responsibility for issuing diplomatic passports and has given it to the Home Ministry.

Given the fact that diplomatic passports are regulated under international conventions that are within the competence and responsibility of the Foreign Ministry, taking away this role is not just a surprising move; it is another development that goes to prove that there are forces within the Government who are working, for some unknown reasons, to marginalize the Foreign Ministry.

There was a time after Bangladesh's independence when the Foreign Ministry was a major hub of governance. It then worked hand in glove with the Prime Minister's Office and was responsible for everything related to the country's foreign relations. In the 1980s, the Foreign Ministry was systematically stripped of most of its powers and responsibilities. The elected governments that came after the end of military dictatorship continued to weaken the Foreign Ministry. The consequences have not been good. Bangladesh gradually lost a lot of its standing in international politics and became known for many negatives that the country did not deserve. A fragmented style of conducting foreign relations where many Ministries have become stake holders without anyone really coordinating together with the partisanship nature of domestic politics left the Foreign Ministry with precious little authority to formulate a coherent foreign policy for the country. The Prime Minister's foreign policy initiatives will become fruitful only if the Foreign Ministry is given the powers necessary to coordinate the foreign policy functions of the Government instead of being a minor stakeholder in that process, under constant threat of losing whatever role it has at the moment.

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## Carrots instead of sticks for Karzai

BARRISTER HARUN UR RASHID

Afghan President Hamid Karzai visited Washington from May 10 - 13 for what Obama administration officials described as an opportunity to evaluate the broad strategic partnership between the two countries as they focused on shared security, governance and development goals.

Speaking to reporters May 7, U.S. Army Lieutenant General Douglas Lute, special assistant to the US President for Afghanistan and Pakistan, said Karzai's visit would come midway between President Obama's December 2009 announcement of his strategy for Afghanistan and its one-year review in December 2010.

Lute said it also comes ahead of Karzai's consultative peace jirga at the end of May and his hosting of an international conference in Kabul in July, where he is expected to deliver action plans on his November 2009 inauguration commitments, followed in September by Afghan parliamentary elections and a second round of the US-Afghan strategic dialogue.

Karzai's visit "takes place at a very important time," Deputy National Security Advisor Ben Rhodes said.

same administration officials who once savagely criticised his leadership.

Lt. Gen. Karl W. Eikenberry, the Ambassador to Afghanistan, who personally escorted Karzai on the flight from Kabul to Washington, said he had faith in the Afghan President's determination to succeed, a position that stands in contrast to his diplomatic cable last fall.

## US's new strategy

Operation "Moshtarak" was launched during February in the Taliban-dominated Nad-e-Ali district of central Helmand to break the nexus between the drug trade and the insurgency it funds.

After the defeat of Taliban in Marja in Helmand province in February, Afghans and Americans struggled to establish a local government that can win the loyalty of the people to fend off the Taliban. However, Afghan officials rarely show up at work and do little to help local people. Corruption, big and small, remains an overwhelming complaint. Under the circumstances, it is very difficult to depend on loyalty on local people to fight against the Taliban.

President Hamid Karzai has no effective control in Kandahar province because of its hostile political environment. The Pashtun in Kandahar remain

The success of the Kandahar offensive may well depend on whether Afghans can overcome their distrust with the Karzai government because President Karzai's brother in Kandahar who monopolises NATO contracts and other development projects is disliked by large portions of populations.

Of greater concern is that the government is not engaging the people by delivering services and combating endemic corruption. The province finds it convenient to run the southern provinces including the Kandahar province through warlords and druglords and they have carved out political power and economic opportunities.

Another recent complicating factor is that up to one third of poppy harvest has been destroyed this spring by mysterious disease, according to the UN officials. In recent weeks Afghan farmers started blaming Americans and NATO militaries for spreading the disease, although the UN officials say the disease has occurred naturally.

The US military believes that eradication of poppy plant at this time is counter-productive because they need the loyalty of Afghan people in Kandahar province. The US and NATO have been sending tens of thousands of new troops into Helmand and Kandahar to wrest control of Taliban strongholds.

Karzai believes there are thousands of Taliban members with no ideological basis for fighting his government. He called them "country boys," driven to the insurgency either by Taliban intimidation or by disillusionment with past government failures.

The strategy is once the Taliban are beaten in their strongholds, midlevel Taliban leaders are likely to leave the extremist Taliban. Karzai sought US blessing for wider talks with the moderate Taliban when the time comes. President Barack Obama seemed non-committal during a White House news conference with Karzai on 12th May.

However, Clinton said on 13th May "And on a personal note, they must respect women's rights." Among the conditions for peace talks, midlevel Taliban leaders would have to renounce violence, cut ties with al-Qaida and its affiliates, and abide by Afghanistan's laws and constitution. Karzai nodded beside her but did not address the women's rights aspect of possible talks with the Taliban. The other conditions apply, he said.

Karzai's plans for reconciliation with hardliners, beginning with his upcoming 'peace jirga,' must succeed first. That jirga, scheduled at the end of May, is supposed to bring together some 1,500 Afghan leaders, including leaders of the insurgency, to hash out the terms of a national reconciliation.

The plans for national reconciliation are bold, ambitious, and they recognise the limitations of the government's power - and yet there's no guarantee the Taliban will even show up at the jirga.

Observers say Afghans know that Americans and European troops will probably pack their bags and leave the country within 18 months, and given this scenario, it is doubtful whether the Afghan government with past tainted record of governance can build trust within that time with the Afghan people.

The US wanted the visit to underscore the strategic partnership between the US and Afghanistan and to underscore to Karzai that it's not soldiers but services that count for Afghans people.

That means good governance including decentralization of power to provinces is imperative. The question is whether President Karzai will be able to mitigate the grievances of Afghan people by delivering adequate services to them?

The author is former Bangladesh Ambassador to the UN, Geneva.

## Germany deploys more fighting equipment to Afghanistan

After the mid-April decision to deploy Panzerhaubitze 2000 self-propelled guns to the north of Afghanistan, German Defense Secretary Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg announced additional heavy materiel, such as infantry fighting vehicles (IFV), also would be sent.

While emphasizing this does not represent a general arms build-up, he told the German weekly magazine Focus that another 15 Marder IFVs would be transported to the north of Afghanistan. In addition, the Bundeswehr troops would be equipped with Panzerschnellbrücke 2 vehicle-launched bridges and Dachs tracked engineer tanks.

According to the Bundeswehr Operations Command, Bundeswehr troops in Afghanistan have 10 Marder IFVs with Büffel tracked salvage tanks. Including about 100 Fuchs armored personnel carriers and about 200 Dingo protected wheeled vehicles, the military has about 1,000 protected vehicles on location.

While the IFVs and self-propelled guns start heading toward the Hindu Kush, the Bundeswehr still has no plans to send its heaviest weapon, the Leopard 2 main battle tank, according to a Bundeswehr Operations Command spokesperson.

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## Russia vows to not use Black Sea base for attacks

President Dmitry Medvedev on May 18 moved to assure the West and states with Black Sea coastlines that Russia would not use its military base on the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea to attack a foreign country.

Medvedev's comments came just under a month after he unexpectedly agreed on a deal with Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich to extend the lease of the base of the Russian Black Sea Fleet by at least 25 years.

"Will Russia use its Black Sea Fleet to attack neighboring states? It will not. We are a peaceful nation," Medvedev told students at a top Ukrainian university in Kiev.

"We are all adults, no one wants a return to the Soviet past."

The fleet's base in Crimea, which juts out into the Black Sea, enjoys a key strategic position and there have been fears in some quarters that a resurgent Russia could use the base to attack third countries.

The Russian Black Sea Fleet played a role in the August 2008 war with pro-Western Georgia, which has a Black Sea coastline.

The deal over the extension of the fleet's lease, for which Ukraine was given a substantial discount on Russian gas prices, also provoked the ire of Ukrainian nationalists who denounced it as state treason.

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## Prospect of Iranian sanction gathers pace

A new phase of discussions over how to impose sanctions on Iran for its continued pursuit of nuclear technology for military means has opened ahead of a crucial review conference set for 3 May in New York of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), to which Tehran is a signatory.

Meeting in Beijing with Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao, the EU's top diplomat, Catherine Ashton, said that talks had progressed beyond whether or not to impose a fourth round of economic punishments against Tehran despite Chinese reluctance to do so. Ashton said it was now a question of what measures should be imposed.

Targeted sanctions focusing mostly on holdings of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps as well as senior individuals believed to be most involved with the nuclear issue have gained considerable traction at the impetus of the United States and its Security Council partners France and the UK, as well as Germany. China and Russia have traditionally opposed such measures, owing to foreign policies that for the most part shun sanctions at the UN level as well as to their considerable financial and economic ties with Iran, which is still a major oil producer.

In a statement released on 28 April the Chinese Foreign Ministry said that it did not "oppose a twin-track strategy" that continues to pursue diplomatic dialogue while also discussing sanctions. Wen's comments in his meeting with Ashton reflected that statement, she said.

With the prospect of waning support in the Security Council, Iran has made some international overtures, while still falling short of the international demands that it halt its nuclear enrichment programme. Tehran has insisted that its intentions are civilian in nature, despite mounting evidence to the contrary. Recent exercises in the Persian Gulf as well as an Army Day parade that featured mock-ups of missile defence systems have only added to international concerns - reflected both at the Security Council as well as in the region - about Iranian intentions.

A senior member of the Iranian delegation to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) told Jane's that Iran has, in principle, agreed to allow IAEA monitors greater latitude in inspecting and observing activity at the enrichment facility at Natanz. Iran has also agreed to some, but not all, of the oversight the IAEA had asked for, the delegate said, although enrichment activity will neither be postponed nor interrupted for want of monitoring.

Iran began to enrich uranium to 20 per cent in February. In early April Tehran produced 5 kg of 20 per cent material, which is to be converted into fuel rods for research reactors.

Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki was in Vienna on 25 April for discussions with the IAEA, following up repeated requests by the nuclear watchdog for further information about the activities at Iran's two known nuclear enrichment sites. Senior Iranian military officials have in recent weeks confirmed that the development of a third site was under way.

The trip to Vienna had a corollary benefit as Austria is currently serving as one of the 10 non-permanent members of the Security Council.

Meanwhile, preparations continue for the five-year review of the NPT. Some 30 foreign ministers are expected to attend the meeting at UN headquarters in New York; Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad has applied for a US visa so that he, too, may participate.

Janes Defence Weekly.



## Repair of strained relations

The Afghan President's visit has repaired ties in a relationship that seemed to crumble over the course of the year. The US has criticized Karzai for turning a blind eye to the corruption and drug trafficking within his government. Karzai, in turn, has accused US officials of failing to give him the support he needs to do his job.

The strain worsened when US officials questioned the validity of his re-election. Richard Holbrooke, the US envoy to the region, reportedly stormed out of a meeting with the Afghan leader. Once Karzai felt sufficiently snubbed, he made a public show of "threatening to join the Taliban."

During the visit this time, he received a red carpet treatment and a barrage of niceness - a walk through the garden, dinner under chandeliers, extra face time with the President, and glowing reports from the

wary of Kabul-Pashtun's domination of the country.

The NATO plans to create a ring of stability in the populous districts that surround Kandahar city by putting troops to restrict Taliban's mobility. These forces, according to a report, will be in place by August and the additional 30,000 US troops will be placed in the surrounding districts.

Kandahar is of the utmost strategic significance to the Afghan government and NATO due to its critical position on Afghanistan's ring road. Furthermore Kandahar has great economic value from non-poppy agriculture in its fertile river valleys and trade due to linkages with Pakistan's Balochistan province.

It is also important to win in Kandahar because of its symbolic significance as the Taliban's spiritual home. The Taliban will robustly fight to retain its vital ground or it will become irrelevant in southern Afghanistan.