

CONNECTING THE DOTS

Leadership change in China



A. R. CHOWDHURY

A number of important elections and leadership changes are due to take place across Asia over the next 12 months -- the most important being in China. Nearly all of China's highest-ranking policymakers will be replaced at the National Party Congress of the Chinese Communist Party later this year. Current top leaders, including President Hu Jintao, Premier Wen Jiabao, and Chairman of the National People's Congress Wu Bangguo, are all expected to retire as they have completed two terms from 2003.

Ultimate authority in China resides with the Communist Party. Many senior officials have both party and government titles, but major policy and personnel decisions are made by the party's Central Committee, the Politburo, and ultimately the nine-member Politburo Standing Committee, China's top decision-making body.

Of the nine Standing Committee members, Mr. Hu and Mr. Wen are among seven who are expected to depart as they pass

the party's unofficial retirement age of 68. Vice President Xi Jinping and Vice Premier Li Keqiang are the only two likely to remain on the Standing Committee.

This explains the widespread presumption that Xi and Li will be the senior figures of the incoming leadership team and be appointed president and prime minister, respectively. Xi emerged as the front-runner as Hu nominated him to the post of vice chairman of the powerful Military Commission. Vice Premier Li, who was one of the contenders, is now expected to take over as premier from Wen.

What economic impact will this change in leadership have in China? There are not many precedents for this leadership change. For what it's worth, the last two transitions were marked by accelerating investment growth in the years immediately before and after the change.

The short-term economic impact of the leadership transition depends on how it affects policy decisions in the coming

months. There are a couple of reasons to think it may induce officials towards more stimulative policies. One is that individual officials seeking promotion will do what they can to support growth in the short-term to put the best possible face on their

Ultimate authority in China resides with the Communist Party. Many senior officials have both party and government titles, but major policy and personnel decisions are made by the party's Central Committee, the Politburo, and ultimately the nine-member Politburo Standing Committee, China's top decision-making body.

economic record. The other is that policymakers at the macro level will be keen to ensure that the handover takes place against a backdrop of economic strength or, at the very least, stability.

Similarly, officials have little incentive to champion and implement significant policy reform in the months ahead of the transition, when it could alienate potential supporters and raise short-term uncertainty. Consequently, the policy changes

that would be needed soon for China to meet its Five-Year Plan goal of significant structural reform are unlikely in 2012.

Over the longer term, the issue is whether incoming officials will have different priorities and views from those they will replace. Senior officials in China reveal little about their personal views. But there are a number of scenarios worth considering for their impact on policy. The first and most alarming is that the consensus driven policymaking process of the past decade breaks down once the new set of leaders is installed. This would be the most drastic change from the recent past. Since no individual now has the authority to impose his will on others, the result, at the extreme, could be policy instability.

The second possibility is that the current balance between interest groups on the Standing Committee is maintained. This seems much more likely -- the incoming members will be chosen by current members and so will presumably promote simi-

lar interests and views, and they will have every interest in ensuring that the government collectively is effective.

But little is known about how the Standing Committee functions or the extent to which there is friction between its members. It is possible that the balance of power has shifted, in which case a change of policy emphasis may follow. This could be the third scenario.

Accordingly, the main point of interest for outsiders watching the Party Congress will be what the new line-up tells us about the new balance of power.

That said, any shift in policy focus will not be immediately obvious. The current Standing Committee will have significant control over this and next years' appointments throughout the Party and government at both central and local level. As a result, the outgoing leaders will retain some influence even in retirement, helping to promote continuity of policy.

For the neighbours of China, the most likely scenario is a continuation of current export-promoting economic policy; despite the change in the leadership.

The writer is Professor and Chair, Department of Economics Marquette University. E-mail: abdur.chowdhury@marquette.edu

Pakistan's memogate drama

MAHMOOD HASAN

Act I

US Navy SEALs stormed into a private house just outside Pakistan's prestigious military Academy in Abbotabad on May 2, 2011, and killed Osama bin Laden.

Pakistan Army Headquarters and its powerful Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) had no clue that US was launching an attack deep inside Pakistan to take out the much sought-after Laden, chief of al-Qaeda. President Asif Zardari and Prime Minister Yusuf Gilani were also left out of the intelligence loop of the CIA.

Both the government leaders and the

Zardari of failing to protect Pakistan's sovereignty over the Laden killing. Gilani in turn blamed the army's ISI for intelligence failure regarding Osama bin Laden.

Act III

As the bickering continued between the army and the government, President Zardari felt threatened that General Kayani may stage a coup and take over.

In early May 2011, soon after the killing of Laden, Pakistan's Ambassador to Washington Hussain Haqqani entered the scene. He recruited Pakistan-born US businessman Mansoor Ijaz to convey a verbal message to US Chief of Joint Staff Admiral Mike Mullen to prevail upon Kayani not to dismiss Zardari.

vention to cut the Generals down to size. This indicates how weak and insecure Zardari was.

Act IV

On October 10, 2011, Mansoor Ijaz wrote an article in the *Financial Times* admitting that he delivered a memo to Admiral Mullen. The army was incensed at the revelation and a renewed bout of recrimination commenced between Kayani and Zardari-Gilani combine. Kayani views the memo not only an act to undermine the armed forces but also an act of treason committed by Zardari. Under intense pressure Ambassador Haqqani resigned from his post on November 19, 2011, denying any role in the memo.



Asif Zardari



Yusuf Gilani



Admiral Mike Mullen

army chief looked sheepish, searching for words to explain their grave intelligence failure. First of all, how was it that ISI did not know that Osama bin Laden was hiding in Abbotabad, and secondly how was it that the government of Pakistan did not know about the US raid inside Pakistan? The nuclear-armed army looked inefficient, weak and powerless, while the government appeared unable to protect its sovereignty.

Clearly, trust between Washington and Islamabad had taken a deep dive for quite some time before Laden's killing. The White House chose not to inform the ISI or the Pakistan government about the covert operation.

Since the May 2011 incident, disgraced Army Chief Ashfaq Kayani has been fighting an uphill battle to reestablish the army's credibility.

The days of Prime Minister Gilani seem numbered and a general election not too far away. Democracy in Pakistan has always had a short life.

Ijaz did not have any direct access with Admiral Mullen, but had an interlocutor James L. Jones, former Nato commander and National Security Adviser to President Obama. Jones asked Ijaz for a written memorandum to avoid misunderstandings. Haqqani, at the behest of Zardari, then dictated a memorandum addressed to Admiral Mike Mullen and gave it to Mansoor Ijaz, who then passed it on to Admiral Mullen sometime during the second week of May 2011. Though Admiral Mullen initially denied any knowledge of the memo, he later said that he knew about it but "thought nothing of it."

The six-point memo requested the Obama administration to convey a "strong, urgent and direct message" to Army Chief General Kayani and ISI Chief General Shuja Pasha to "end their brinkmanship aimed at bringing down the civilian apparatus." It went further, inter alia, to suggest that a "new national security team" would be set up to "implement a policy of either handing over those left in the leadership of al-Qaeda, including Ayman Al Zawahari, Mullah Omar and Sirajuddin Haqqani, or give US military forces 'green light' to capture or kill them on Pakistani soil." This was a clear offer to surrender sovereignty.

The memo denounced the army and went on to state that there was a "dangerous devolution of the ground situation in Islamabad where no central control appears to be in place." It begged US inter-

This was the moment for opposition leader Nawaz Sharif to fish in troubled waters. On November 23, 2011, he filed a petition with the Supreme Court to investigate the scandal. Meanwhile the army also started its own investigation. Prime Minister Gilani, on December 22, 2011, declared that he would not accept "a state within a state." Gilani and Kayani have been trading accusations and warnings against each other as relations between them continue to deteriorate.

As the accusations from both sides grew louder -- nervous people feared that an army takeover was imminent. Unnerved, Zardari fled to Dubai twice -- on December 14, 2011, on grounds of convalescing from a mild stroke and on January 12, 2012. On each occasion he returned after a brief stay.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court began contempt proceedings against Gilani and summoned him to appear on January 19 to explain his failure to reopen corruption cases against Zardari. Clearly, General Kayani, Nawaz Sharif and the Supreme Court have ganged up against Gilani. Incidentally, Chief Justice Iftikhar Chaudhry, who was sacked by President Pervez Musharraf, is sympathetic towards Nawaz Sharif.

Final Act

General Kayani is unlikely to push out Zardari -- not because he loves him but because Washington will not bless his taking over power in Pakistan at this juncture. Americans feel that the Pakistani armed forces have metamorphosed, from the days of President Musharraf, into an untrustworthy force infiltrated by *jehadi* elements. However, the days of Prime Minister Gilani seem numbered and a general election not too far away. Democracy in Pakistan has always had a short life.

The writer is a former Ambassador and Secretary, and Policy Advisor, Center for Foreign Affairs Studies.

Gendered patterns in voting and political participation

MARIHA KHALID and IPSHITA BASU

In the general election of 2008, almost equal number of women and men turned out to vote, but do women exercise the same level of political rights? According to *The Daily Star* Democracy Poll, 86.4% of women voted in the last election. A staggering 89.9% believe that they can make a difference through the power of the ballot. The election was hailed as a "coming of age" of women, where the Election Commission pulled off an effective campaign giving women not only the confidence to vote, but also to vote the way they wanted to without influence by male family members.

It is sadly true, however, that we tend to pay lip service to democracy, and the only thing that is meant by this word is elections. For democracy to really thrive, we have to take in its broader meaning to encompass diverse opinions and participation from all sections of the population. While the survey shows that an almost equal number of men (42.3%) and women (40.7%) believe that they have the freedom to participate in political activities and speak their mind, it has also shown that compared to men very few women participate in day-to-day politics and matters of state. An almost negligible number of women participated in protests, election/referendum campaigns or political meetings. Even women's organisations, which ranked third after the Parliament and the courts for their role in facilitating democracy, appear to have only 0.2% of women who have directly engaged in political activities. This makes to ponder why women are likely to come out in throngs to vote, but are just as likely to stay away from politics.

Our question is set against a wider concern that meaningful democratisation is not determined simply by the inclusion of women as voters but through access to social development and changes in patriarchal structures and norms which operate in stubborn and stark ways.

There have been attempts at facilitating the political participation of women. Most notable is the quota of reserved seats for women in the parliament. But how far has it really encouraged female participation in politics? These seats are traditionally viewed as a "vote bank." The female MPs from the reserved seats are considered ineffectual in parliament and hardly have the power to influence decision-making. Bangladeshi politics still prefers male candidates to win in elections and the view from the top is that nominating a woman for a seat is akin to losing it. Furthermore, women are generally employed in "soft" political areas such as social welfare, cul-

tural affairs, health and family planning and so on.

Therefore, although there is almost a similar level of political awareness between men and women and indeed a history of female political leadership, these have been founded on a deeply embedded patriarchal system that cuts across the public as well as the domestic spheres. *The Daily Star* Survey shows that constraints to women's active participation in the public sphere of politics begin in their homes. 83.2% of respondents reported that they were housewives. Of them, the majority (41.7%) were primary school graduates with only 5.8% moving on to formal education and 1.6% to Masters level. This shows that despite the positive improvements in female literacy, Bangladesh is still caught up in patriarchal traditions with women's higher education and career regarded as less important than that of their male family members.

Furthermore, when asked whether men and women should have equal rights, including in family matters and inheritance of property, 77.8% of women respondents agreed while 27.8% male respondents as well as 12.4% female respondents disagreed.

That Bangladeshi democracy has patriarchal underpinnings emerged vividly in the volatile debate that

took place over women's inheritance rights earlier this year. When, on the occasion of Women's Day, the prime minister implemented the Women's Development Policy, even pro-government Islamic parties opposed the policies. Others took to the streets claiming that the policy was anti-Quran when, in fact, over the years, the policy had regressed to offer rights over property that women had already inherited and did not contradict Muslim property laws. A more stark revelation of patriarchal influence is in the dismally low number of women who join the workforce. A recent World Bank report puts it down to the widespread violence against women, of which most take place in their own homes. Women who participate in political demonstrations are particularly more vulnerable to such abuse, even from the law enforcement agencies.

Bangladesh has made significant progress in women's reproductive health and literacy, and certainly it is to the credit of women that they have successfully mobilised for rights and development in political and civil society arenas. However, to achieve democracy where the second sex has an equal chance at political participation we need to probe deep into patriarchal biases that cut across all levels of public life, going all the way to our homes.

The writers are Research Associate, IGS and Head of Research, IGS, respectively.

Despite the improvements in female literacy, Bangladesh is still caught up in patriarchal traditions with women's higher education and career regarded as less important than that of their male family members.