

# Why is India's Foreign Minister visiting the U.S. . . . again?

Why India's Foreign Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has suddenly decided to pack his bags and rush off to Washington, D.C. later this month (April 24), so soon after the visit by U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Warren Christopher to Delhi, is a total mystery in this capital. U.S. strategic policy, from Iran to Indochina, lies in total shambles and, in the Indian subcontinent, it is generally recognized that the U.S. is asking British

---

---

***A report from our special correspondent  
in New Delhi, India***

---

---

advice on every one of its moves.

Experienced political observers compare Vajpayee's latest U.S. trip to his ill-fated China visit. Then, despite reliable intelligence that the Chinese were planning to humiliate the Minister by attacking Vietnam and then comparing the attack to the 1962 India-China war while he was in Peking, Vajpayee insisted on going. Similarly, it is suggested that Vajpayee could find himself sitting in Washington when the nation of Pakistan begins to unravel in the post-Bhutto era: either by the centrifugal stresses of the Pakistan-Iran "Islamic" provocations against Indo-Soviet ally Afghanistan, or in some other unpredictable way.

There are two levels to the current foreign policy crisis in India—governmental and national—and it is the combination of these two that is driving Vajpayee to Washington to seek the Anglo-American point of view. Governmentally, the Janata cabinet is committed to the Carter Administration's China-centered Asia policy. It is now part of a deliberate conspiracy to straitjacket India as a junior partner to the London-Peking-Washington confrontation policy. Henry Kissinger's visit to China this month and intense diplomatic silence in New Delhi—reflected in both India's continued withholding of recognition to the Kampuchean government and its restraint from attacking the Sadat-Begin treaty—are part of the same package. The added feature is that, since the government collapse in Britain has prevented Foreign Secretary David Owen from

coming to India, Vajpayee has agreed to visit Washington to brief the Anglo-Americans on what Soviet Prime Minister Alexei Kosygin's full message to India was during his four-day April visit.

Vajpayee's great disadvantage in foreign trips is that national public opinion in India is not behind his or his government's policies. While even domestically the argument that the Janata government is better than the "authoritarian Gandhi regime" is toning down, on foreign policy, the public generally does not believe in deviating from the basic nonaligned tenets established by the late Jawaharlal Nehru and followed by Indira Gandhi.

When China attacked Vietnam in January, the Indian public crossed party lines to express outrage over the Chinese assault and solidarity with the Vietnamese people.

When Pakistan's Prime Minister Bhutto was hanged, every newspaper, every Indian mourned the loss; irrespective of caste, or religion, a mass condemnation of the brutal act occurred. Some observers compared the emotional outpouring with the day after Mahatma Gandhi's assassination by communalists.

The Janata government's plight is that it cannot "keep up" with the population. The re-emergence of Indira Gandhi as the national alternative to articulate the nation's opinion has thrown the Janata party into a desperate race to hold on to power as long as possible. The character assassination of Mrs. Gandhi, aided by such U.S. Zionist lobby figures as New York Senator Moynihan, is part of this race. The Bombay gold, financial, and industrial markets are now engaged in futures trading for the Prime Ministership of India. It is believed by many business sources that Vajpayee's high profile foreign-policy making is part of the effort to "sell the product"—the ambitious Foreign Minister—as heir apparent to the aging and truculent Prime Minister Desai.

## **Issues on agenda in U.S.**

Several recent "promises" will be reevaluated during the Vajpayee visit to Washington. In late March, at the height of the Chinese aggression against Vietnam,

Assistant Secretary of State Christopher visited New Delhi. At the time, he told the Indian government that "absolutely anything including the much stalled nuclear fuel" deliveries will be made available by the U.S. as long as India maintained an "evenhanded" foreign policy. By this, Christopher meant a delay in Indian recognition of the new Kampuchean government, a not too strong or serious denunciation of China's actions, and a wait-and-see attitude on the Pakistan-Iran situation. Christopher concluded his short India visit by calling a few select reporters to a hurried press conference and announcing that there was "congruence" in Indian and U.S. views. At the time, India's Foreign Office denied the story, reiterated its stand that Chinese withdrawal from Vietnam was not linked to Kampuchea in any way, and then kept quiet.

Christopher then went off to Pakistan. In retrospect, there is little doubt that Christopher had a preview notice of Bhutto's fate, the mind of the Pakistani military, and the much touted story that Pakistan is secretly utilizing British and European technology to enrich uranium for exploding a nuclear device. The story was withheld at the time.

Once Bhutto was hanged and Pakistan put under brutal martial decrees to prevent popular revolt, Western newspapers, aided by Janata news outlets, have gone big with the nuclear story, particularly picking up General Zia's phrase-mongering that "Zionist circles" in the U.S. are responsible for keeping Pakistan backward. At the same time, Zia proposed that India and Pakistan engage in a "joint mutual inspection treaty," binding India to open its nuclear facilities to Pakistani inspection in exchange for a Pakistani pledge to not produce the bomb. Zia is also suggesting that Pakistan's nuclear capability is "the Islamic nuclear capability"—a self-serving argument since Zia did not care much about the Arab world's pleas to keep Bhutto alive.

Vajpayee will have to face this controversy in the U.S. Any involvement in Zia's inspection scheme would be tantamount to handing India over to Chinese inspection! The Soviet daily, Pravda, has just denounced the Pakistani nuclear venture as primarily a Chinese geopolitical design. China has been supplying arms through the Karakoram Highway to Muslim fanatic guerrillas engaged in destabilizing the Afghan government. To the north, thousands of Chinese advisors have amassed in Nepal ostensibly to build roads. Bangladesh has recently finalized arms deals with Peking. Vajpayee's bilateral approach to China has come under fire by Defense Ministry officials from the Defense Minister down to the analysts viewing this encirclement process.

### **Soviet-Indian relations**

American officials may be seeking a briefing from Vajpayee on Kosygin's visit to India, but they may be very disappointed. Vajpayee was not present at many

of the sessions where there was an exchange of views on China; only Desai and Kosygin carried out that exchange. Well-informed sources indicate that Kosygin said privately what he said daily publicly. He attacked the Chinese leaders as "aggressive," "expansionists," "hegemonist," "adventurist," and "criminals" in their actions and urged India to take a vanguard role among the nonaligned nations and uphold the interests of China's neighboring states.

At one public appearance, Kosygin asked a question that has haunted many Indians: "Tomorrow they (the Chinese) may not like India, and probably they may like to teach India a lesson and the day after tomorrow, Japan. Who has given them the right to sit in judgment upon other peoples and nations and to treat in that manner a nation which has been fighting imperialism for decades and wants a normal life for its people?"

Kosygin's visit will be followed by a high powered Soviet delegation led by Defense Minister Ustinov and scheduled to arrive April 22. Ustinov will elaborate Kosygin's earlier offers of Soviet aid in modernizing and expanding India's armed forces, including the offer to assist in building nuclear-powered submarines.

By far the most important of the Soviet offers is not in the military field, but winning peace through economic development. The 15-year science and technology pact offered by Kosygin is the kernel to this strategy. The main proposal is to tie Indian planning in with Soviet five-year plans and thus bring capacity utilization to underutilized industrial plants in India, particularly through sales to socialist countries. The 15-year deal envisions Indo-Soviet collaboration in third country development, a project never before explored on such a scale, and Soviet participation in India's nuclear energy development and plant expansion. In a nutshell, the Soviets are engaging in a massive city-building campaign.

Besides the offer for Soviet collaboration in building nuclear reactors six times the size of the U.S.-aided and problem-plagued Tarapur plant, a discussion is believed to have taken place for contingencies in the event the U.S. continues to hold back on supplies of critical enriched uranium for the Tarapur reactor.

The Indo-Soviet treaty runs concurrent with the 25-year accord signed by West German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt and Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev last year. With the scheduled visits of France's President Giscard d'Estaing, German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt, and possibly Soviet President Brezhnev to India this year, the Soviet offer becomes a proposal for East-West-North-South collaboration with tremendous implications for Third World development as the European Monetary System is fully implemented.

—Paul Zykofsky  
Special Correspondent,  
New Delhi, India