

Vietnam rejects Clinton free society call

AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

HANOI, Nov. 19. — Vietnam's Communist leader today dismissed President Bill Clinton's call for a freer society, hailing the guerrilla resistance against the USA in the Vietnam War as the cradle of determined socialism.

But Mr Clinton urged Vietnam to make room for greater individual freedom. He said that he hoped more Americans would become "involved with the Vietnam of the future and not the Vietnam of the past." Mr Clinton's historic visit to the Communist nation ended today.

In the regime's first response, both to Mr Clinton's live address to the nation on Friday and the unprecedented cheering crowds of tens of thousands that greeted his arrival in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh city, the Communist Party secretary general, Mr Le Kha Phieu, demanded that the US respect Vietnam's monolithic political system.

In his keynote speech on Friday, Mr Clinton said: "In our experience, guaranteeing the right to religious worship and the right to political dissent does not threaten the stability of a society. Instead it builds people's confidence in the fairness of our institutions."

While Mr Clinton stressed that the US did not seek to impose its ideas, he singled out freedom of expression as essential to economic development.

Vietnam has sweeping secrecy legislation which the authorities use to reinforce tight press controls.

In a tone that contrasted markedly with Mr Clinton's pleas to bury the past on his landmark reconciliation visit, the first since the end of the Vietnam war in 1975, the Vietnamese leader banged the drum of Communist North Vietnam's victory over the US-backed South Vietnam.

"The resistance wars brought the Vietnamese people national

independence and reunification to advance the country towards socialism) and so for the Vietnamese people, the war was not ultimately a story of darkness, sadness and unhappiness", the official Vietnam News Agency (VNA) quoted Mr Phieu as saying. Rather than leave the two former foes' painful history behind, "the question was to properly understand the nature of the past, and particularly the anti-aggression resistance war which the Vietnamese people had to fight", he said.

"Vietnam had waged the war to end the country's occupation by imperialists", Mr Phieu said. He made no mention of Mr Clinton's plea for freedom of information as integral to economic development, nor of the President's raising the question of human rights and religious tolerance in Vietnam.

He also signalled that any hopes in Washington that Mr Clinton's visit would accelerate the introduction of a full market economy in Vietnam were ill-founded. "In the current economy, the state and cooperative sectors play a primary role", he said.

Turning to the US President's warning against a closed economy and society, Mr Phieu said that Vietnam had pursued international integration and cooperation, but on its own terms, forging ties with both governments and left-wing organisations around the world.

"We respect the choice of lifestyle and political system by other nations. In we in return, ask for other nations to respect our people's choices... To respect each other's national independence and sovereignty, and not to intervene into the other's internal affairs," Mr Phieu said, employing the stock phrase used by the Communist regime to warn off criticism of its human rights record.

"The future of the vietnamese nation is independence and Socialism."

Mr Clinton mixed with the crowd on

a narrow shopping street, shaking hands and stopping at markets in the city, known as Saigon before its surrender to Communist forces 25 years ago.

On a sweltering day, he sat in a courtyard of fine arts museum here to discuss Vietnam's future with young people in business, arts and media. He extolled the virtues of freedom and the challenges of the global economy.

"One of the great debates every society must have is how to balance individual freedom with the need for ... cohesion of families, communities and nation," he said.

Despite his plea, Vietnam's powerful Communist party chief said his country would follow its own ways. "We respect other nations' choices of lifestyle and political systems," Mr Le Kha Phieu was quoted as telling Mr Clinton. "We also demand that other nations respect our country's political system and choices."

After two days in Hanoi, Mr Clinton arrived here yesterday. Thousands thronged along the route for his 15-minute drive from the airport, waving and cheering as his motorcade swept by. Ahead of Mr Clinton's appearances, police broke up a sit-in had camped out beneath protest banners for several months near a government office.

Mr Clinton yesterday denounced the war's dead — 3 million Vietnamese and 58,000 Americans — as well as children maimed by left-over mines and bombs.

Mr Clinton is the first US President in 31 years to visit Vietnam, and the first ever to stop at Hanoi. In a farewell meeting with President Mr Tran Duc Luong at Hanoi, he joked about the US election stalemate. "I have to go home to see if there's a President."

Mr Luong called Mr Clinton's visit "a new page" in relations.



Miss Chelsea Clinton looks at handbags at a shop in Ho Chi Minh City on Sunday. — AP/P

JUNTA STRIKES BACK

Attempt to liquidate Suu Kyi's party

BIZARRE events are taking place in Myanmar whose sole purpose is to liquidate Aung San Suu Kyi-led National League for Democracy. After having forced several middle-level party leaders to resign in September, the military junta is now resorting to a variety of dirty tricks. Recently it forced two elderly landladies of the building where the NLD's modest headquarters is located in Yangon to serve a quit notice. The argument — neighbours complain that frequent army road blocks for conducting search and seizure operations disrupt normal life. The giveaway was that 'no pressure from outside' forced the landladies to serve the notice. If the eviction order is carried out it will mean the NLD will have no central office. Another proof of the junta's intention is the hate campaign in the Government-controlled media. Stage-managed rallies are held daily outside Yangon where 'forced' resolutions render them incommunicado. Public meetings have long been banned. As a result the functioning of the party has almost been brought to a standstill. The junta is simultaneously projecting the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA) as a rival to the NLD and "as the true representative of the Myanmar people". Membership is compulsory for bureaucrats and all those seeking favours from the Generals. The junta has already got Chinese recognition for USDA and the Chinese Communist Party has forged 'fraternal' ties. What has also boosted the morale of the generals is the resignation of the UN human rights special rapporteur on Myanmar Mr Justice Rajsoomer Lallah who was not allowed to enter Myanmar but submitted well-researched and legally acclaimed reports. It is tragic that lack of funding forced his resignation. His predecessor Professor Yozo Yokota resigned in 1996 on similar grounds. Have the votaries of democracy the world over suddenly become so poor that they can't support a UN sponsored watchdog on Myanmar? The junta must be amused.

THE STATESMAN

22 NOV 2000

Differences won't mar ties: Hanoi

By Amit Baruah

HANOI, NOV. 18. The Vietnamese President, Mr. Tran Duc Luong, has made it clear that Hanoi expects the relationship with Washington to be based on the principle of non-interference in internal affairs while not letting differences stand in the way of mutual cooperation.

Addressing the banquet he held in honour of the visiting U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, Mr. Luong said: "In our joint efforts to gradually build a new cooperative relationship, we all are aware of the big difference between our two countries in geographical location, social systems, history, culture and economic development levels. It is, therefore, understandable that the two sides may have differences regarding some specific positions and policies."

Mr. Luong said as a developing country, which had been devastated by the war, Vietnam needed "appropriate assistance" from the United States. "It is our firm conviction that enhancing mutual understanding and promoting multi-faceted cooperation, especially in economic, trade, scientific-technological, health care and educational and training areas will surely help improve Vietnam-U.S. relations and facilitate Vietnam's national development... this is a positive way for us to resolve lingering issues of the past." The war, the President stressed, had taken a heavy toll of Vietnam. Without mincing words, he said: "As such, the Vietnamese people (have) all come to the view that the U.S. Government should be aware of the tremendous losses that the Vietnamese people have suffered."

"In the immediate future, we believe that the U.S. side should pay due attention to and respond, in an appropriate manner, to Vietnam's humanitarian issues by

cooperating with us to seek information on Vietnam's missing personnel, demine and neutralise unexploded bombs and ordnance; detoxify former military bases and provide necessary assistance to Agent Orange victims and solve other humanitarian issues left behind by the war," the President said.

The agenda for action by the United States was clearly spelt out by the Vietnamese President. While there was no demand for an apology or for war reparations, the humanitarian consequences of the American war in Vietnam, in the President's view, had to be addressed. Referring to the missed opportunities of the past in relations with the U.S., Mr. Luong said: "In the early days of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and later on, our President Ho Chi Minh, on many occasions expressed to leaders of the United States of America the Vietnamese people's desire and suggested many forms of cooperation between our two countries."

"History has shown that the Vietnamese people's burning desires for independence, freedom and pursuit of peace to build the country were not met," Mr. Luong said. "In the 60s and 70s of the 20th century, the Vietnamese people were forced to carry out the just resistance war to regain our independence and freedom, and suffered the greatest loss ever in our national history. The war devastated our country and at the same time left no small scars to the American people," Mr. Luong said in a forthright expression of the Vietnamese view.

The Vietnamese people, he said, remembered and were grateful to the widespread movements by the people of America and the world, calling for an end to the war. "Together with the Vietnamese people's resistance war, those movements helped bring the war to an end in 1975."



Looking out over an Missing In Action excavation site (from left), Mr. David Evert, the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, Mrs. Hillary Clinton, their daughter, Ms. Chelsea Clinton, an unidentified American official, Mr. Dan Evert, and the anthropologist Dennis Danielson in a field at Tien Chau, Vietnam, on Saturday. — AP

Mr. Luong stated. "Over the last eight years, we have travelled a long path in improving our bilateral relations. However, that is only the beginning. Hopefully, your visit to Vietnam will mark a new stage of lasting cooperative and friendly relations on the principle of respect for independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity," said.

A throwback to a painful history

By Amit Baruah

HANOI, NOV. 18. A grim-faced American President, Mr. Bill Clinton, and his wife, Ms. Hillary Clinton, saw the devastating consequences of about 3.5 million landmines and some 800,000 tonnes of unexploded ordnance on Vietnamese children and adults at a graphic exhibition today.

Mr. Vis Xuan Hong, Acting President, Vietnam Union of Friendship Organisations, informed Mr. Clinton that on average three to five persons were falling victim to the mines and ordnance in today's Vietnam daily.

Mr. Clinton and his wife were given a detailed account of the demining efforts that are going on in the country. For the first time this year, the U.S. has contributed \$ 3 millions to the demining programme while it spends about \$ 100 millions annually in locating 1,498 Americans listed as missing-in-action (MIA) in Vietnam.

Earlier in the day, the President and his wife travelled a short distance out of Hanoi (Vin Phuc province) to see ongoing excavation operations to locate the remains of Capt. Lawrence G. Evert, whose F-105D aircraft was brought down by Vietnamese artillery on Nov. 8, 1967.

In an unprecedented move, the President had also invited two sons of Capt. Evert to the site.

As Mr. Clinton, dressed all in black, watched the extraordinary cooperation between his country and Vietnam and America on the MIA issue (the labourers used in these digging operations are all Vietnamese, supervised by Americans and Vietnamese jointly), his officials said that 283 MIA remains had been returned since the President took office.

Back at the exhibition on de-mining, the President, who successfully evaded being drafted to fight the war, was informed through graphics that the Americans dropped 15 million tonnes of bombs, landmines and ammunition during the conflict — 3.9 times more than all of World War II.

Speaking at the function, Mr. Clinton promised the Vietnamese that they would have America's support till every landmine in the country was defused.

Appreciating the work being done in the demining area, the President said the problem of landmines was a "global tragedy". Mr. Clinton said that 90 per cent of all victims of war were civilians and that landmines kept killing even after wars were over.

The President also stated that the U.S. would work together with the Vietnamese to create a computer system that would locate landmines in the country.

"Since I became President, the U.S. has spent (globally) \$350 million on extricating landmines, but I think we should do more," Mr. Clinton maintained.

During his stay, Mr. Clinton has also been conscious of 300,000 Vietnamese missing since the war in Vietnam. He presented to the Vietnamese President, Mr. Tran Duc Luong, several hundred thousand pages from American records on the issue, and much more is to follow.

In an assessment of the President's visit so far (Mr. Clinton will be in Ho Chi Minh City tomorrow), the American Ambassador to Vietnam, Mr. Pete Peterson, said he rated the trip to be a "huge success".

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Open a new chapter in ties: Clinton

By Amit Baruah

HANOI, NOV. 17. The U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, today spoke of a "new chapter" in its relations with Vietnam as he became the first-ever American Head of State to visit Hanoi.

During the day, Mr. Clinton also held talks with the President, Mr. Tran Duc Luong, and the Prime Minister, Mr. Phan Van Khai.

Addressing students at the Vietnam National University, a speech which was carried live on domestic television here, Mr. Clinton said he was "honoured" to be the first President to visit Hanoi.

"But I do so, conscious that the histories of our two nations are deeply intertwined in ways that are both a source of pain for generations that came before, and a source of promise for generations yet to come," Mr. Clinton said, in a speech whose parameters were dictated by domestic American yardsticks on Vietnam.

Harking back to history, Mr. Clinton stretched relations between the two countries to the times of Thomas Jefferson to place ties in perspective. "Of course, all this common history... has been obscured in the last few decades by the conflict we call the Vietnam war and you call the American war."

Referring to the memorial for the 58,000 war veterans in the U.S., Mr. Clinton also spoke of the "other side of the wall" — the "staggering sacrifice of the Vietnamese people on both sides of that conflict, more than three million brave soldiers and civilians".

In Mr. Clinton's view, this shared suffering had placed the two countries in a unique relationship. "Because of the conflict, America is now home to one million Americans of Vietnamese ancestry..." he stressed.

Speaking about the visit of U.S. veterans to Vietnam, he said: "When they came here, they were determined to honour those who fought without refighting the battles; to remember our history, but not to perpetuate it, to give young people like you in both our countries to live in your tomorrows, not in our yesterdays."

"Today, the United States and Vietnam open a new chapter in our relationship. At a time when people all across the world trade more, travel more... the movement of people, money and ideas across borders, frankly, breeds suspicion among many good people in every country..." he said.

Making a pitch for globalisation, Mr. Clinton turned to Vietnam and referred to the benefits that had accrued after Hanoi adopted the policy of "doi moi" (renovation), disbanded collective farming, joined APEC and ASEAN and normalised relations with the U.S. and the European Union.

After referring to the new knowledge-based economy, Mr. Clinton said: "Let me say, as important as knowledge is, the benefits of knowledge are necessarily limited by undue restrictions on its use. We Americans believe the freedom to explore, to travel, to think, to speak, to shape decisions that affect our lives enrich the lives of individuals and nations in ways that go far beyond economics."

Stating that America's record in this area was not perfect, Mr. Clinton, however, told the students: "For example, we have seen that economies work better where newspapers are free to expose corruption, and independent courts can ensure that contracts are honoured... that public officials honour the rule of law."

Without naming "Agent Orange" (the deadly defoliant that was dropped by American aircraft on Vietnam and is responsible for all kinds of deformities), he referred to one of its constituents, dioxin and spoke of the joint study on the chemical cocktail's health and ecological effects.

"Let the days when we talk past each other be gone for good. Let us acknowledge our importance to one another. Let us continue to help each other heal the wounds of war, not by forgetting the bravery shown and the tragedy suffered by all sides, but by embracing the spirit of reconciliation and the courage to build better tomorrows for our children", he added.

Warm welcome

Earlier, a warm and dignified welcome was extended to Mr. Clinton at the Presidential Place this morning.

Mr. Tran Duc Luong, greeted Mr. Clinton, who came in from Brunei last night. A Vietnamese band played the national anthems of the two countries as their flags flew side-by-side.

THE HINDU

18 NOV 2000

Open up, Clinton nudges Vietnam

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REUTERS

HANOI, Nov. 17. — The US President, Mr Bill Clinton, gently urged Vietnam today to consider strengthening its respect for human rights, opening up its political system and further liberalising its economy in a live, televised speech.

"Let me say emphatically, we do not seek to impose these ideals, nor could we," Mr Clinton said in the speech at Hanoi national university that the Vietnam's leadership, in an unusual act, allowed to be broadcast on national television.

"Only you can decide if you will continue to open your markets, open your society and strengthen the rule of law," he told several hundred students at the university. "Only you can decide how to weave individual liberties and human rights into the rich and strong fabric of Vietnamese national identity."

Mr Clinton made his case in part by pointing to the US history of civil liberties and political freedoms, while acknowledging the stain of slavery in the USA and the long denial of political rights to blacks and women.

"In our experience young people are much more likely to have confidence in their future if they have a say in shaping it, in choosing their governmental leaders and having a government that is accountable to those it serves," he said.

Ceremony: Mr Bill Clinton — standing beneath a bust of the legendary Ho Chi Minh, architect of the Communist victory over US-backed forces 25 years ago — today said he was "looking forward to building toward the future" with America's one-time enemy. adds AP.



Mrs Hillary Clinton and daughter Chelsea walk with Vietnam Women's Union members to a meeting at Yen Tang village on Friday. — AP/PTI

Mr Clinton, who as a young man resisted the draft and led anti-war protests, became the first US President to visit Hanoi, the capital once bombed by American warplanes.

"I'm glad to be here," Mr Clinton said, welcomed by a military band and honour guard at the French-built presidential palace near the mausoleum honoring the revered late leader known as Uncle Ho. "I'm looking forward to building toward the future. It was very moving this morning, this welcoming ceremony."

Mr Clinton posed for pictures with the Vietnamese President, Mr Tran Duc Luong, under a larger-than-life bust of Ho. He was joined by his wife, Hillary, and their daughter, Chelsea.

"I know that you have come a long way to Vietnam," Mr Luong told his American guest as they stood under a canopied

platform in the warm morning sun. "I hope this trip will be very interesting for both countries."

At the university speech, Mr Clinton said, "We cannot change the past. What we can change is the future." He sprinkled his speech with Vietnamese phrases.

Flanked by the flags of both nations, Mr Clinton also promoted the economic benefits of the bilateral trade agreement both nations signed this summer.

Vietnamese officials have told Mr Clinton they were prepared to sign an international labour convention aimed at banning the worst forms of child labour abuse, the White House spokesman, Mr Jake Siewert, said.

Mr Clinton and Mr Luong also were witnessing the signing of a scientific and technology pact covering issues such as flood-control management, marine research control and disease prevention.

HILLARYSPEAK

YEN TANG (Vietnam), Nov. 17. — After touring a tiny, dusty village on the outskirts of Hanoi today, Mrs Hillary Rodham Clinton addressed a town hall meeting of women who have benefited from a lending program (called the *Affectionate Fund* and modelled after the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh) that helps alleviate poverty in rural families.

"For many years, I've believed in the power of small loans. You have once again proved what can be done by women with some small help and hard work," Mrs Clinton said. — AP

Another agreement dealt with labour issues such as skills training, worker safety and working with the disabled.

THE STATESMAN

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Vietnam for opening new chapter in ties with U.S.

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By Amit Baruah

HANOI, Nov 10. The Vietnamese Foreign Minister, Mr. Nguyen Dy Nien, has referred to the "unfortunate past" in relations with the U.S. as the American President, Mr. Bill Clinton, is scheduled to visit Hanoi from November 16.

In his first detailed comments on the Clinton visit, Mr. Nien said it was "undeniable that there exists an unfortunate past between Vietnam and the United States. This belongs to history which cannot be changed by anyone".

Vietnam, he said, intended to promote cooperation with the U.S. in an effort to boost bilateral ties to a higher level.

"This is the way to solve consequences left behind from the past so as to look towards the future," Mr. Nien was quoted as saying on Thursday.

Mr. Clinton, who will be the first American President to visit Vietnam since its reunification in

1975, was praised by Mr. Nien for his "important contributions to promoting the normalisation process".

Mr. Nien said relations between the two nations were established on the basis of respect for national independence, sovereignty, non-interference in each other's internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit.

Since 1987, the two countries had agreed to help each other resolve humanitarian issues (left over from the war), he said, adding that the U.S. had recognised Vietnam's effective cooperation in dealing with American servicemen listed as missing-in-action.

Vietnam was in dire need of humanitarian support, including greater and faster aid from the U.S., to deal with the grave consequences of the war, he said.

During his visit, Mr. Clinton will hold talks with the Vietnamese President, Mr. Tran Duc Luong,

the Communist Party General Secretary, Mr. Le Kha Phieu, and the Prime Minister, Mr. Phan Van Khai.

Mr. Nien said Mr. Clinton would also have the opportunity of meeting Vietnamese students and visiting several historical spots and "natural beauty spots".

Mr. Clinton's entourage, which is said to be in the range of 1,500, comprises Congressmen, business persons and journalists. These people, he said, would get a first-hand impression of a beautiful country with its distinct cultural identity and peace-loving, tolerant people.

The Clinton visit, in Mr. Nien's opinion, would ultimately be beneficial to both sides, and contribute to peace, stability and prosperity in the region and the world. This, he said, would meet the aspirations of the people in both the countries.

THE HINDU

11 NOV 2000

ILO sanctions against Myanmar

GENEVA, NOV. 18. The International Labour Organisation (ILO), an agency of the U.N., has cleared the way for sanctions against Myanmar's military Government for using widespread and systematic forced labour. HD-12

Last June, for the first time in its 81-year history, the ILO resolved to invoke an article of its constitution to allow sanctions by Nov. 30 unless Myanmar provided evidence that it had ended the use of forced labour. 19/11

Though Malaysia, on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, led an effort to soften any penalties, it was overwhelmingly defeated by the agency's governing body. This cleared the way for the sanctions to go into effect.

The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, based in Brussels, said the decision should result in the labour agency's "calling on all tour operators to cancel planned trips to Burma (Myanmar's old name) on the grounds that forced labour is being used to develop tourist infrastructure." Multinational companies investing in Myanmar, including oil companies, could also become the focus of the agency's attention, it said. — *New York Times*

DPA reports from Yangon:

The military junta of Myanmar on Saturday dissociated itself from the ILO's Convention 29 in response to the organisation's decision to penalise the regime.

THE HINDU

19 NOV 2000

Clinton will try to promote reconciliation, say US officials

Owen Bennett Jones
Hanoi, November 15

BILL CLINTON'S last scheduled foreign trip as President will take him to Hanoi this week, where, according to US officials, he will try to promote reconciliation and bring "closure" to a war that cost 58,000 American and over two million Vietnamese lives.

"There was a war in Vietnam. It ended in 1975. It's past tense. Way past tense," said Pete Peterson, the US ambassador to Hanoi. Mr Peterson was himself a prisoner of war in Vietnam and symbolises the Clinton administration's attitude to the country.

"I was deeply involved in the conflict. But I have come back here because I want to build bridges, not destroy them," he said.

Most Vietnamese express remarkably little resentment about the war and the huge loss of life it

caused. US veterans, who have returned to Vietnam, are often surprised by the welcome they receive. While the conflict is not forgotten, for the most part it is forgiven.

Back in the 1960s, Chuck Scarcey was a Saigon-based US military intelligence analyst. He has returned to manage various development projects in Hanoi. "Over

Hanoi Visit

the last six years, I have travelled all over Vietnam. In all that time only three people have asked me in a negative way if the US knew what it was doing back then," he said. "It is remarkable to me that only three people have asked me that."

While the Vietnamese seem at ease with their 1975 victory, the White House is aware of the sensitivities that still exist in the US.

Unsurprisingly, President Clinton, who arrives tomorrow, will not visit the mausoleum of Vietnam's revered wartime leader Ho Chi Minh. Nor will he visit a less politically charged alternative - the tomb of the unknown soldier. Too many US veterans are not ready for such a gesture, especially from a draft dodger. Clinton's decision to study in Oxford rather than fight in Vietnam may have caused him persistent political difficulties in the United States but it will play well in Hanoi.

"We welcome Mr Clinton because he was himself against the war," said Lt Gen Nuan Vinh Vu. Like other senior Vietnamese leaders, he recognises that there are limits beyond which Mr Clinton will not be able to go. "The Americans were at fault here but we do not expect him to apologise - it is better to make up for what happened by action." (Guardian News Service)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

15 NOV 2001

Vietnam visit a tough call for Clinton

By Amit Baruah

HANOI, NOV. 16. It's being played low-key in Vietnam. A few welcome banners have been put up warmly welcoming "H.E. William Jefferson Clinton and his spouse", but the first-ever visit by an American President is being treated as a routine official visit.

As Mr. Clinton arrived from Brunei a little before midnight with a 2000-strong delegation, the Vietnamese were all geared up this evening watching their team battle it out with Indonesia in the football field in Bangkok.

Everywhere in this picturesque city, people were glued to television sets watching the outcome of the Tiger Cup match. Shouts and howls could be heard in different parts — signalling that football for the Vietnamese was bigger than Mr. Bill Clinton.

The newly-elected Senator from New York, Mrs. Hillary Clinton, came in here late this afternoon, ahead of her husband who will be accompanied on this historic visit to Vietnam by their daughter, Ms. Chelsea Clinton.

For a man who avoided the draft and was critical of the American war in Vietnam, Mr. Clinton's is a visit rich in symbolism. Perhaps to remind the American people about what his visit was all about, the President told a gathering of U.S. war veterans recently: "In our national memory, Vietnam was a war. But Vietnam is also a country emerging from almost 50 years of conflict, upheaval and isolation, and turning its face to a very different world." But the visit is a tough call for even the media-savvy President. His choice of words must appeal to the Vietnamese, but should not raise a storm back home. While making the distinction between Vietnam as a country and Vietnam as a war, Mr. Clinton will be wary of openly and candidly admitting that America did make mistakes, big mistakes in its conduct in Vietnam.

"Whatever we may think of the political decisions of the Vietnam era...the brave Americans who fought and died there had noble motives. They fought for the freedom and the independence of the Vietnamese people. Today the Vietnamese are independent..." Mr. Clinton said on July 11 1995, when the U.S. normalised its relations with Vietnam.

The problems of formulation can clearly be seen in the above extract. The President can only make "that much" of a gesture, not more. However, to the Vietnamese, concerns relating to the war are important though they



A Vietnamese soldier stands guard near American and Vietnamese flags at the Noi Bai International Airport in Hanoi on Thursday, ahead of the U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, visit. — AP

haven't made it into a big deal.

Even a cursory look at Mr. Clinton's programme would reveal that it's all about America back home. Apart from holding talks with the three top Vietnamese leaders — the President, Mr. Tran Duc Long, the Prime Minister, Mr. Phan Van Khai, and the General Secretary of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP), Mr. Le Kha Phieu — Mr. Clinton will go to an excavation site for missing-in-action (MIA) remains. He will also participate in a subsequent repatriation ceremony of MIA at the Noi Bai international airport in Hanoi and make an unprecedented live address tomorrow over Vietnamese television.

Mr. Clinton is also under fire from the right in his country, who want him to stress issues of human rights in Vietnam. Many right-wingers have openly scoffed at his visit.

For the U.S. its policing role in the world may have changed after the demise of the Soviet Union, but it very much believes that maintaining order in the world remains Washington's principal responsibility.

In 'Vietnam Shadows', a book on the legacy of Vietnam, Mr. Arnold R. Isaacs, former war correspondent, writes: "If U.S. leaders in the

1960s had had a clearer vision of the Asian realities, they might have seen Vietnam's war more clearly for what it was: a local struggle for mastery of Indochina, rather than a proxy struggle between major adversaries with all of South-East Asia, or even the entire Pacific region, at stake."

"And seeing that, the American leadership might also have more accurately seen how limited U.S. interests were in Vietnam — interests that did not even come close to justifying the enormous cost of our doomed effort there. Instead, the United States based its decisions on a narrow and faulty perception that blotted out the complex particulars of Vietnamese politics and history. Through American lenses, Vietnam only appeared a battleground for competing superpowers — a square on a chessboard, without distinctive shape or other features of its own." Mr. Isaacs argued. Today, Mr. Clinton has the opportunity to give shape to his concept of better relations with Vietnam. It's an opportunity which Vietnam, the U.S. and the rest of the South-East Asian region cannot afford to miss.

Is he up to it?

THE HINDU

17 NOV 2000

Vietnam hopes Clinton visit brings cooperation

Hanoi, Nov. 14: Vietnam hopes US President Bill Clinton's visit this week will invigorate economic cooperation between the two old enemies, a veteran leader of the Communist government said on Tuesday. "We hope to achieve economic cooperation between the two countries," senior adviser to the Communist Party and former Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet said. "So far, there have been relations in politics and other fields... (Economic cooperation) is beneficial for both Vietnam and the United States," said Mr Kiet, who was Vietnam's Prime Minister from 1991 to 1997 and dubbed a reformist.

Mr Clinton, who has been a champion of reconciliation with Hanoi, is due to start a three-day visit late on Thursday as the first ever by a serving US President to a unified Vietnam.

Mr Clinton lifted a punitive trade embargo against his country's former battlefield enemy in 1994, then oversaw the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1995.

He capped this by laying the groundwork for closer business ties with a bilateral trade agreement signed earlier this year. Mr Kiet said closer economic relations with the US would be beneficial for Vietnam's reform efforts. (Reuters)

THE ASIAN AGE

15 NOV 2000

10-12-2/11

PERSISTING TYRANNY

S. H. B. S. Myanmar

IT IS AMAZING and even incredible that while almost everywhere else in the world authoritarian regimes are on the run, the military junta in Myanmar has been digging itself in and has remained wholly insensitive to international condemnation of the repression it has been letting loose on its helpless people. The latest U.N. report on the military junta's suppression of democracy and political activity in Myanmar and the snuffing out of human rights is a shocking revelation of how the mindset of the regime has remained stuck in the earlier centuries when tyranny was the way of life for rulers.

It is a tragedy that democracy has not been allowed to strike roots in Myanmar which won independence in the same year as India, in 1947 from British rule. Almost right from the moment it had emerged as a free country, Myanmar was giving itself the image of a killing field. The Myanmar freedom fighter, Gen. Aung San, was brutally assassinated in March 1947 when he was being sworn in as Prime Minister of his country by his political rivals among whom was U Saw who was later executed for his part in the killing. If, half a century later, the generals remain in position in Myanmar, apart from the tragedy of it, it is also ridiculous that the brass hats are stepping out of the barracks, where they should have stayed, to run Governments for which they are ill qualified.

The generals of Myanmar do not seem to realise that while the jackboot could go on grinding underfoot freedom for a while, it wears down under its own weight to give out a piteous and clumsy picture of itself. Though the tragic scene in Myanmar presented in the U.N. report might seem to rule out hopes of a civilian Government returning to throw out the military regime in the near future, the people of Myanmar who have been courageously rebelling against the military rulers under the leadership of Ms.

Aung San Suu Kyi would not have lost hope about the scene brightening up much faster than they perhaps think.

The happenings in Myanmar presented in horrifying detail in the U.N. report could actually be the latest updated edition of the proceedings of the notorious Star Chamber of the 17th century which resorted to arbitrary justice for the political victims of the monarchy. How else does one understand a state policy of the "enforcement of laws, orders and administrative action specifically designed to criminalise normal political activity?" The intimidation by the leadership of the National League for Democracy and the imposition of severe restrictions on movement outside a particular locality, apart from giving an idea of the ruthlessness they could resort to, should also be seen as a clear indication of the state of desperation in which they find themselves. It is doubtful whether while tracing the records of even the Star Chamber proceedings one could find a parallel for the large-scale relocation of the ethnic areas accompanied by forced labour and inhuman treatment to which the U.N. Commission has drawn attention while reporting on human rights violations in Myanmar. The 17th century was indeed a very bad time for whoever was living then but it was happily free from the "fruits of progress" the world was going to see in the coming centuries. The ethnic relocation of areas resorted to by the Myanmar regime is aimed at the forcible shifting of labour for depriving insurgents of food, funds and resources. The military rulers obviously believe that such terrorising of insurgents will kill the urge for freedom. It is more likely that the ranks of the insurgents will only increase and recall the writing of a historian of the French Revolution about Frenchmen in uniforms joining Frenchmen in rags for throwing out the tyrants.

THE HINDU

2 NOV 2007

U.N. report blasts Myanmar junta

HD-16
20/10
By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, OCT. 29. The military authorities in Myanmar continue to prefer "repression of all political activity" to engaging in a genuine political dialogue with pro-democracy forces, a U.N. report has said.

Mr. Rajsoomer Lallah, Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights, in his statement before the Third Committee of the U.N. General Assembly, held that the human rights situation in the country showed no signs of improvement.

"This policy (of suppressing political activity) continues to be implemented, first, by the enforcement of laws, orders, and administrative action designed to criminalise and sanction the exercise of normal political activity; secondly by the intimidation, harassment and detention or imprisonment of the NLD (National League for Democracy) leadership and membership, and of other Opposition groups; thirdly, by the severe restrictions that govern their movement outside their particular locality and, fourthly, by the large scale closure of branch offices of the party," Mr. Lallah said.

According to him, such a policy inherently violates the fundamental freedoms of association, assembly and movement as well as freedom of expression, all of which have found their consecration in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related covenants.

Mr. Lallah said that extreme poverty and the absence of food security are a result of a policy approach pursued by the military authorities in Myanmar.

"This policy is implemented by large-scale relocation in the ethnic areas, accompanied as it has been, by forced labour, inhuman



The British human rights activist, Mr. James Mawdsley, with his parents after his return to London on Oct. 21, following his release from a Myanmar prison. Mr. Mawdsley said he was beaten whilst in prison, and vowed that he would keep up his campaign against Myanmar's rulers, urging the international community to continue highlighting human rights abuses in the country.

treatment and other much graver violations of human rights, depriving the rural population of their lands and consequently, of their means of sustenance," the Special Rapporteur said.

"Forced relocation has been going on for many years and would appear to be in furtherance of a scorched earth policy, or what is known as the Four Cuts strategy adopted by the military, that is to say, depriving insurgents or suspected insurgents of firstly, food, secondly, funds and resources, thirdly, sources of intelligence and information, and, fourthly, possibilities of recruitment. All this is exacerbated by the Army forcibly taking, without any payment, any rice, poultry and other farm animals to feed themselves and burning off the rest of the crops," the statement said.

In conclusion, Mr. Lallah said, it was his unfortunate and regrettable duty to address the General Assembly year after year to report

on a human rights situation which showed no sign of improvement and which discards the repeated resolutions of the Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights.

"It remains my firm conviction that the situation will experience a fundamental change if the authorities begin to privilege a genuine political dialogue over military and repressive solutions to a problem which is essentially political and which is so adversely affecting not only the people of the country but also the neighbouring countries of the region..." he said.

"It remains my hope that the authorities in Myanmar, after the lapse of a decade since the conduct of the last general elections, begin to respond in a positive way to the resolutions which have been adopted by the General Assembly and the Commission on Human Rights," Mr. Lallah's statement added.

THE HINDU

30 OCT 2000

Oversight begs redressal

By ignoring the force of the ethnic minority population, the international community is playing into the hands of the junta, which doesn't want the National League for Democracy and the ethnic groups to join forces and put pressure on the military regime, says YINDEE LERTCHAROENCHOK

FOR five years, the international community has concentrated primarily on breaking the political deadlock in Yangon. They seem to have ignored other political factors which brought Myanmar to military rule, about 40 years ago.

Inevitably, the world has followed every word and move of the Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi, since her release from house arrest in mid-1995. By refusing to obey the junta's wish to exile her overseas or to be subdued by suppression, Mrs Suu Kyi has remained the glowing torch for the democracy struggle in Myanmar.

Unquestionably, she is respected as "the leader" by both the Myanmar democracy movement and the 12-odd ethnic rebel groups fighting for autonomy from Yangon.

But international peace attempts seem to have resulted in only a tighter deadlock, with the junta responding with more arrests and crack-downs on Mrs Suu Kyi's party, the National League for Democracy.

The global community remains divided over developing a common approach whether to use the carrot or the stick — to effectively force the ruling generals to open talks with the NLD. Diplomats in Yangon and key Myanmar players outside are equally in the dark as to what keeps the regime together despite persistent speculation about serious internal splits among the ruling generals.

For now, they are hoping that an imminent threat of political sanctions by the International Labour Organisation against the use of forced labour might influence the regime to have second thoughts over its persistent refusal to start a dialogue with the NLD.

An ILO technical team is currently in Myanmar, to examine if the regime has complied with ILO recommendations for an end to the practice of forced labour. If the ILO finding is negative, a series of sanctions will go into effect on 30 November. It's still unclear if other UN agencies will be bound to take similar steps to isolate the junta.

Although ILO sanctions will be welcomed by Myanmar's pro-democracy group and Western countries which called for the imposition of tough punishment on Yangon, some Asian diplomats doubt if sanctions will be effective in forcing the junta to change as long as its allies in East and South-east Asia — particularly China and Japan — remain supportive of the military regime.

Inside Myanmar, the armed ethnic groups which have struck a ceasefire agreement with Yangon, are equally frustrated over a stalemate in tackling their political demands for autonomy. On



Aung San Suu Kyi: Glowing torch for the democracy struggle in Myanmar and members of the Karen ethnic minority who crossed over to Thailand after their rebel stronghold in Kawmoora fell to Myanmar troops. — AP/PTI.



the issue of Myanmar's ethnic minorities, there is a virtual lack of international interest in their plight. "The ceasefire groups are unhappy as there seems to be no political space for them to manoeuvre," said an ethnic Myanmar scholar.

"There is no way for them to organise or even to meet. They are trailed all the time

by the junta. Some groups feel that everything is being held hostage to the political deadlock between the NLD and the junta," he said.

Like the scholar, many guerrilla leaders have made similar complaints over the apparent concentration of global efforts on activism in Yangon. The deteriorating political, economic and social

situation in the ethnic minority areas is ignored internationally. Except for illicit drug-trafficking activities, nothing else seems worthy of catching their attention, said one leader.

By ignoring the force of the ethnic minority population, the international community is playing into the hands of the junta, which doesn't want

the NLD and the ethnic groups to combine their political strength and put pressure on the regime.

The leaders said the secession demands of Myanmar's ethnic minorities had triggered the ethnic armed revolt in the first place and the subsequent military coup of 1962 that led to the annulment of the "secession rights".

"Without an acceptable resolution to the ethnic nationalities' rights issue, there will never be peace," said an ethnic leader.

Although most ceasefire groups are in touch with one another, they have tried not to provoke Yangon's suspicions about their activities and contacts with supporters outside Myanmar. Most of these groups have decided to strengthen their positions, in case there are political changes.

In September, representatives of many ethnic groups — including the Lahu, Pa O, Palaung, Shan and Wa — met and agreed to begin drafting a Shan State constitution. While the first draft is expected to emerge in 13 months, consultations with grassroots people have begun. This will educate them on democracy, which is the primary objective of the charter.

"We hope to mobilise the grassroots and bring about

harmony and unity among various ethnic nationalities in Shan State. The charter also aims at ethnic reconciliation and building of a democratic foundation among the people," said another prominent ethnic leader involved in the drafting of the charter.

Other armed ethnic groups, including those in the Arakan, Chin, Kachin, Karen and Mon states, are also on the verge of drafting their state constitutions. These will, hopefully, serve as political documents should the time come for the drafting of a federal constitution in Myanmar.

Though the drafting method varies from state to state — the Shan State drafting committee prefers to consult the local people for their input, whereas the Kachin leadership intends producing a draft and asking its people to comment — the writing of the charters is an independent exercise of the ethnic population.

These people, who constitute about 20 to 30 per cent of the country's 45 million population, have in the past decade been largely ignored while internal politics has focused primarily on Yangon.

For the first time, it seems the armed ethnic groups have begun thinking seriously about the future they want in Myanmar and about how to strengthen the indigenous peoples in the border areas. As always, they refuse to be dictated to about their future.

— The Nation/Asia News Network.

U.N. achieves little in Myanmar

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, OCT. 13. The visit by the U.N. special envoy, Mr. Razali Ismail, to Yangon this week has done precious little to tone down criticism by the military junta of the pro-democracy leader, Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi.

Ms. Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) party is also likely to be evicted from its Yangon office — an office which has been cited as evidence of the military Government's tolerant attitude.

The official press today described Ms. Suu Kyi as a "democracy stunt actress" and her NLD party as a "hut of democracy".

"However much the democracy stunt actress and the international colonialist group are shouting at the top of their voice that theirs is a legal party, the hut of democracy can no longer stand as a legal, political party", a com-

mentary in the *New Light of Myanmar* and *Myanma Alin* newspapers said.

"Diplomats of the international colonialist group are giving instructions on the affairs of the party and this is against the political parties registration law", it said.

"The persons called diplomats from the U.S. embassy and British embassy are attentively and earnestly arranging things for and giving instructions on political and organisational activities of the political party which is opposing and attacking the incumbent Government of the State", the commentary added.

Earlier in the week, Mr. Razali Ismail, a Malaysian, held meetings with Gen. Than Shwe, head of the military junta, Lt. Gen. Khin Nyunt, chief of intelligence, and Ms. Suu Kyi.

So far, no account of the meetings has been given, but the spe-

cial envoy's discussions with Gen. Than Shwe are the first of their kind. Previous envoys had not been able to meet the junta chief.

It is being speculated that the two meetings between Ms. Suu Kyi and Mr. Razali were because the envoy wanted to convey something to the NLD leader after meeting Gen. Than Shwe.

Here, it may also be recalled, that ASEAN has rejected a proposal to set up a "troika" to hold negotiations between Ms. Suu Kyi and the junta.

Myanmar, even before the proposal was formally rejected, had expressed its unhappiness over the move, which enjoyed the blessings of Bangkok, to set up the "troika" mechanism, agreed to by ASEAN only in July this year.

Some ASEAN members believe that quiet diplomacy, and not a European Union-style "troika" will help ease the situation in Myanmar.

A bid to halt revolution

BELGRADE, OCT. 13. Yugoslavi newly-elected President, Mr. Vojislav Kostunica, was struggling to restore the momentum of the revolution on Thursday as the Milosevic old guard recovered nerve.

Tensions began to develop between the new President and supporters after he gave warning that he was "sitting on a volcano".

He complained in a newspaper interview that he was "having most as much trouble from friends as from my enemies".

After an extraordinarily smooth start, the revolution is struggling to overcome obstacles put in its path by Mr. Milosevic's Socialist Party of Serbia and its allies.

They are using stalling tactics to resist demands for them to relinquish control of the Serbian Government. — *Telegraph Group Limited, London, 2000*

THE HINDU

14 OCT 2000

SB Ari
Myanmar

Stalemate in Myanmar

110-21

ALL DOORS seem firmly shut to the possibility of a rapprochement between Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD) and Myanmar's ruling military junta, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC).

Vietnam, as the new chairman of ASEAN, has rejected the proposal floated by Thailand to operationalise an ASEAN "troika" to bridge the gap between the SPDC and the NLD. A statement from the Vietnamese Foreign Ministry in Hanoi, faxed to *The Hindu* in Singapore, said on the issue: "Vietnam has held consultation with Myanmar and the countries concerned in the Association and on the basis of consensus and non-interference into each other's internal affairs and is of the view that recent development in Myanmar is its internal affair with which outsiders should not interfere."

Given the current state of play inside Myanmar, a wholly self-generated process of dialogue seems to be a difficult prospect.

The accusatory role of the Western world does not seem to have had much impact on the military Government — so, in a sense, an ASEAN or regional role had the best chance of succeeding.

Now, however, after the categorical statement made by Vietnam, the "troika" idea suggested by Thailand has been given a decent burial by Hanoi in consultation with other ASEAN countries.

Quite apart from the impact on Myanmar, the Vietnamese announcement is a clear signal to those ASEAN countries, which favour a more interventionist group that the Association is not moving into a conflict-resolution mode any time soon. Many nations in the 10-member ASEAN have their own problems and disfavour any troika "precedent" which may work against them in the years to come.

Inside Myanmar, it would appear that Ms. Suu Kyi and some of her colleagues are being kept under wraps after they were taken away from a Yangon railway station after a bid to travel outside the capital city.

The official press in Myanmar has unleashed a vicious war of



Myanmar's pro-democracy leader, Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi... freedom denied.

words against Ms. Suu Kyi. In a recent commentary, the *New Light of Myanmar* said: "Having lived abroad, eaten food from abroad and drunk water from abroad for over 30 years, she

All doors seem firmly shut to the possibility of a rapprochement between Ms. Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy and Myanmar's military junta, says AMIT BARUAH.

was virtually deprived of a sense of patriotism. Any citizen will not put up with her act to destroy the nation with the use of her father's name as a stepping stone."

In a separate comment, the State-run *Myanma Min* daily described the Nobel laureate as a "guest" in the country and warned she would be driven out with a "hundred lashes" if she abused her hosts.

"If the guest is good, it contributes to the welfare of the house. But if the guest is bad it affects the household; thus the guest should not abuse

the host or else she'll be driven out with (a) hundred lashes," the daily said.

Such phraseology is a clear indication of the gap between the Government and the pro-democracy leader. For its part, the military regime continues to hammer away at the "foreign-ness" of Ms. Suu Kyi. There are reports that Ms. Suu Kyi is not allowed to see visitors and her telephones are cut off — a virtual form of arrest.

In its annual report for 2000, Amnesty International said there was a continuing stand-off between the SPDC and the NLD. "The NLD maintained its right to convene Parliament and refused to dissolve the 10-member Committee Representing the People's Parliament (CRPP) in the face of the SPDC's demands to do so before considering dialogue." "Although a peaceful civil disobedience campaign was planned by exiled opposition groups in September (1999), the plan did not materialise after the pre-emptive arrest of scores of people by the SPDC. The Myanmar Army continued to engage in skirmishes with ethnic minority armed opposition groups — the Karen National Union (KNU), the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) and the Shan State Army-South (SSA-South).

The fighting caused further displacement of ethnic minority villagers.

Sixteen ceasefire agreements negotiated in previous years between the SPDC and various ethnic minority armed opposition groups were maintained," the Amnesty report, which reviewed developments in 1999, added.

The recent decision to disallow Ms. Suu Kyi to travel out of Yangon, first by road and then by rail has, as expected, raised the hackles of the western world, which thought nothing of cosying up to Gen. Suharto of Indonesia in his 32 long years of autocratic rule. An European Union official went as far as to say in Bangkok this week that the troubled E.U.-ASEAN dialogue which was to take place in Laos in December could be affected by the recent developments in Myanmar. A decision on whether or not the dialogue would take place is expected later, he added.

In the past, there has been separate engagement between the Myanmar junta, Australia and Japan. While maintaining this engagement, Australia has been quite critical of the recent actions of the SPDC. Clearly, the American-led Western world must think up something new if they are to play a role in Myanmar. Mere statements of condemnation do not achieve much.

THE HINDU

8 OCT 2000

struggling economy.

U.S., Vietnam sign trade accord

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, JULY 14. The United States and Vietnam have initialled a landmark trade accord that will provide the South-East Asian country access to the American market on the same terms offered to other nations. In return, Vietnam has agreed to lower tariffs and other trade barriers on a range of American goods and services.

The President, Mr. Bill Clinton, has hailed the signing of the accord as "another historic step in the process of normalisation, reconciliation and healing" between the two nations. "From the bitter past, we plant the seeds of a better future," said Mr. Clinton at a Rose Garden ceremony that was attended by a number of law-makers who had served in Vietnam during the war including the Senator, Mr. John McCain.

The trade agreement between the two countries brings to an end a tough four-year negotiating process; and another step forward in the normalisation process that was opened up by the Clinton administration six years ago.

Mr. Clinton lifted the trade embargo against Hanoi in 1994, restored diplomatic relations the following year and opened the American Embassy in 1996. The emerging economic realities aside, Mr. Clinton has all along maintained that Hanoi has shown increased cooperation in finding

the remains of American soldiers listed missing during the Vietnam war.

The trade deal would have to be approved by Congress; and renewed annually until such time as Vietnam gets into the World Trade Organisation. The approval of Congress is not automatic since it brings to the fore the same groups and activists who are opposed to a deal with the People's Republic of China.

The administration would have to counter not just the labour unions which see a threat from low-wage nations but also from the political front critical of Vietnam's human rights practices. Besides, there is a lobby that still believes that there are Americans — from the Indo China war — held against their will in Vietnam. The U.S. lost some 58,000 service personnel during the Vietnam war and some 2000 are still listed as missing.

Economically, the trade deal is seen to benefit both Vietnam and the U.S. The World Bank is estimating that the accord would increase Vietnamese exports by US\$ 800 millions annually. Currently, Vietnam exports basically coffee to the U.S. but in the aftermath of the accord exports are expected to grow in textiles and shoes. The United States' biggest export to Vietnam is industrial machinery, but farm goods and services such as banking are expected to pick up.

THE HINDU

RENOVATION IN VIETNAM

A VIETNAMESE ACCEPTANCE of the offer being made by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) for the renovation of the Cham group of monuments could virtually bring about a re-discovery of the ancient cultural ties which had been forged between the two countries as far back as the eighth century by the legendary emperor Sri Vijaya. It was again an Indian ruler, Jayavarman, who united the smaller Indo-Chinese states with Angkor as the capital of the Cambodian empire with a population of a million in the ninth century. The Varman dynasty's reign lasted for nearly four centuries. The Indian contribution to the architectural magnificence of ancient South East Asia could still be seen in the grandeur of the monuments of Borobudur described as a "poem in stone". The Sailendra dynasty to which Sri Vijaya belonged had left indelible footprints of Indian architecture and culture in South East Asia including present-day Vietnam. However, much to the amazement of a Western historian, Dr. H. G. Quaritch Wales, there was no mention of the forging of such a rich cultural relationship between ancient India and South East Asia in Western encyclopaedias and the existence of the Vijaya empire was "scarcely known except to a handful of Oriental scholars". This could be because of the cantankerousness to which some Western historians are still susceptible.

The ASI has enough expertise to help Vietnam with the renovation of its ancient structures sinking into decay from the excessive growth of vegetation and the vertical cracks which are splicing them apart. (It is, of course, another matter that a large number of magnificent monuments in India itself including the Taj Mahal — which continues to be exposed to the sulphur dioxide fumes from the Mathura refinery — are in a similar predicament because of official neglect). The razing of many of the structures in Vietnam had resulted from the carpet bombing by the U.S. during its war of

attrition and whatever still survives should be crying out for a massive reconstruction. However, the exposure of the ancient monuments in any country to the sun, dust, wind and rain makes them all vulnerable to decay unless determined efforts are taken to preserve them as the lingering symbols of a rich culture and history leaving a message about the way of life led in a lost civilisation. The excavated ruins of Mohenjodaro and Harappa, for instance, read out that "a very perfect adjustment of human life in a specific environment could only have resulted from years of patient effort", wrote Gordon Childe. The same could be said of other great monuments such as the shore temples of Mammallapuram buffeted by humidity, moisture and the corrosive marine environment. If the sturdiness imparted into the ancient monuments by their builders for preserving them for posterity is a reflection of the greatness of a civilisation, the ancient temples of Vietnam now requiring renovation may have something to tell us. A recollection of the heroic fight waged by the pyjama-clad Vietnamese to throw out the mighty U.S. army from their country in the 1970s after having sent the French colonialists packing twenty years earlier would still leave us pondering over their indomitable will of which Ho-Chi-Minh was the supreme personification.

The cordial relations which exist between India and Vietnam would be further strengthened by whatever assistance the ASI can provide for the renovation of the Vietnamese temples. It should also provide an opportunity to learn much more about the ancient ties between India and Vietnam stretching back to the Sailendra and the Varman emperors. The extent to which they linger — if at all they do — in contemporary Vietnamese awareness is very much worth exploring for the fresh light it could throw on matters of interest to the two countries.

THE HINDU

2 JUN 2000

NO WINNERS HERE

5/16/73 The lousy war in Vietnam 5/16/73

THE war in Vietnam, begun by John Kennedy, liberal man of peace, and ended by Richard Nixon, the conservative belligerent, was supposed to contain global communism from making any further strides; the famous domino theory. In the event, it turned out that what the Americans were dealing with was not so much communism as Vietnamese nationalism which, because of conditions created by the occupying power France, found historical justification in Marxism-Leninism and a charismatic leader in Ho Chi Minh. At the anniversary celebrations recently concluded, Giap spoke of the Vietnamese mind and culture and attributed the success of his military strategies to these two things. Ultimately, however, the power of the image — a superpower using overwhelming force against an infinitely weaker, almost defenceless people — refuted all facile geopolitical pretexts. The last napalm bombing raids, carried out indiscriminately by the US after the 1973 Paris Peace Accord and captured brilliantly in Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now*, devastated large swathes of the countryside in both Laos and North Vietnam. The My Lai massacre always comes up because of its exceptional brutality, but veterans will tell you that burning Viet Cong villages and killing its inhabitants was routine GI practice.

Senator John McCain is wrong when he says the wrong side won. The only winners in that war were the ones to come out unscathed in mind and body. The greater tragedy was perhaps on the American side. It was a war that the US could not justify to its own youth, many of whom came back disillusioned, their faith in their country shaken. What Vietnam did was to radicalise further what had come to be known as the generation gap. The fathers had fought against Hitler, the sons were ordered to kill women and children, they couldn't have the same point of view. Young people began "opting out" of the American way of life — organised religion, family values, hard work, success-worship — and embraced everything that was its contrary. The euphoria didn't last very long. But that caustic rejection of the US of the Cold War and its blind and murderous self-confidence lingers in the memory of that nation. A draft-dodger is President and Mohammed Ali, who went to prison for the same reason, was named sportsman of the century. The Vietnam war introduced self-doubt to America and, hopefully, it has made them more tolerant in their understanding of the world.

THE STATESMAN

MAY 2000

Vietnam: 25 years after

By M. C. Madhavan

TWENTY-FIVE years ago this week, thousands of North Vietnamese and Provisional Revolutionary Government forces triumphantly entered Saigon, achieving their long-cherished goal of reuniting the northern and southern regions into one country. A dream come true in their lifetime. Today, Saigon, or Ho Chi Minh City, is a thriving metropolis of 5.1 million people, about one-sixteenth of the nation's population. It continues to be the most important business centre of Vietnam and the residents enjoy 17 per cent of the nation's income.

Saigon and Vietnam have come a long way from the ravages of war, but have miles to go still. The path is strewn with potholes, small and large. How well the country navigates these obstacles will determine its growth in the next 25 years. Vietnam enjoyed an enviable record of almost doubling its gross domestic product during 1990-98. Since unification, the standard of living has improved so much that per capita GDP at 1690 in Purchasing Power Parity Dollars (U.S.\$ 330) is closer to that of India. Both life expectancy and average educational attainment in Vietnam are higher than almost all the South Asian and Sub-Saharan African countries. Vietnam's human development index, as estimated by the United Nations Development Programme, is in the top half of the similar indices for the developing countries.

Though there are no reliable income distribution data to compare the relative well-being of the people between now and the early 1970s, many of those who have lived through the entire period opine that the extent of deprivation now is much less than what it was 30 years ago. Poverty has come down dramatically from over 70 per cent in the mid 1980s to 40 per cent in 1998. Nearly 45 per cent of the people living in rural areas and 10 per cent living in urban areas are estimated to be below the poverty line. If we consider the money needed to eat 2100 calories of food per capita a day alone, rural poverty is estimated to decline to 18 per cent, and urban poverty to 2 per cent.

The late Prime Minister Le Duan pre-

dicted in 1975 that within 10 years there would be plenty to eat and a refrigerator and a TV set in every home. The first has been achieved now, but the second has not yet become a reality. The Government pays special attention to improving the lives of 54 ethnic minority peoples (nearly 10 per cent of the population) who have not benefited much from the progress the country has made thus far. It encourages the preservation of their culture and art. One such ethnic people, Cham, trace their ancestry to India.

Women's role in Vietnamese political development is something that the country can justifiably be proud of. A Vice-President and the Vice-Chairperson of the National Assembly are women. A woman also serves on the Politburo of the Communist Party. Twenty-six per cent of the members of the National Assembly are women, and also about 20 per cent of sub-national Government office holders. The opportunities for women are expanding. While one would generally expect women to account for a very large proportion of primary school teachers, their share in the Vietnamese teaching profession at the upper secondary level is almost one-half and at the tertiary level almost one-third. Nearly 40 per cent of the graduates are women. Women constitute a large proportion of the labour force in traditional occupations such as textile and garment industry (75-80 per cent), trading (73 per cent), education and training (70 per cent) and health care (63 per cent). It is still difficult for them to break into high paying positions in finance and industry.

One of the areas in which Vietnam has excelled is agriculture. Its growth in the Nineties is spectacular. At 5.1 per cent a year during the Nineties, it was the highest among the Asian countries, and it is com-

Vietnam has come a long way from the ravages of the war. Both life expectancy and average educational attainment in Vietnam are higher than almost all of the South Asian and Sub-Saharan African countries.

parable to that of China in the last 20 years. Paddy production per hectare has almost doubled to nearly 4 tonnes, exceeding the averages both for Asian countries and the world. Only China and Korea have higher yield per hectare. Vietnam was the second largest exporter of rice in the world in 1988.

Light manufacturing industries such as textiles and clothing and shoes have made considerable gains. Foreign private investment has contributed to the development of the sector and export growth. Vietnamese exports in the last ten years have more than quadrupled to over \$ 11 billion in 1988.

Industry sector future performance is closely linked to restructuring State-owned enterprises (SOEs). There are 5,500 centrally-owned and provincially-owned enterprises in Vietnam and they account for 54 per cent of the value added in the manufacturing sector. The Government recently refocused its attention on dealing with many of these ailing SOEs. It is estimated that after restructuring the average capital of each enterprise will increase to approximately \$ 2 million from \$1.3 million now (In Vietnam, these are considered relatively large firms). Of 4,92,000 people employed in these enterprises, 40 per cent are considered redundant. Retraining them and/or finding jobs for them are not going to be easy.

Independent audits of the banking system found that non-performing loans in the joint stock banks and state-owned commercial banks were very large. Recent estimates place them at around 30 per cent. The Government has approached the multilateral institutions for assistance to recapitalise the banks and create an efficient banking structure in the country.

Vietnam has made tremendous progress in the last 10 years and has the potential to grow at 7 per cent or more. To achieve its goal, it has to effectively deal with the problems faced by the SOEs and the banking sector, create conditions conducive to private sector development and a surge in exports and streamline the administrative machinery.

(The writer, currently Fulbright Senior Scholar in the Fulbright Program in Vietnam, is a Professor of Economics at San Diego State University.)

ness. There is a better dialogue between the Government and the private sector, improved incentives for foreign investors and greater private sector access to imported inputs and export outlets. But a survey of the managers of SMEs found that they consider the reforms by the Government insufficient. Poor access to credit, absence of information and unclear Government policies are still hampering the growth of the SMEs, they say. Micro-enterprises' major problem is the lack of working capital and the cost of capital.

Industry sector future performance is closely linked to restructuring State-owned enterprises (SOEs). There are 5,500 centrally-owned and provincially-owned enterprises in Vietnam and they account for 54 per cent of the value added in the manufacturing sector. The Government recently refocused its attention on dealing with many of these ailing SOEs. It is estimated that after restructuring the average capital of each enterprise will increase to approximately \$ 2 million from \$1.3 million now (In Vietnam, these are considered relatively large firms). Of 4,92,000 people employed in these enterprises, 40 per cent are considered redundant. Retraining them and/or finding jobs for them are not going to be easy.

Independent audits of the banking system found that non-performing loans in the joint stock banks and state-owned commercial banks were very large. Recent estimates place them at around 30 per cent. The Government has approached the multilateral institutions for assistance to recapitalise the banks and create an efficient banking structure in the country.

Vietnam has made tremendous progress in the last 10 years and has the potential to grow at 7 per cent or more. To achieve its goal, it has to effectively deal with the problems faced by the SOEs and the banking sector, create conditions conducive to private sector development and a surge in exports and streamline the administrative machinery.

(The writer, currently Fulbright Senior Scholar in the Fulbright Program in Vietnam, is a Professor of Economics at San Diego State University.)

U.S., Vietnam to step up security ties

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, MARCH 15. The U.S. Defence Secretary, Mr. William Cohen, today concluded a historic visit to Vietnam on a note of optimism about ties between the two countries, which had fought an intricate and prolonged war in the past.

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A 'conceptual agreement' as described by the U.S., was reached on a modest military-to-military ties with Vietnam. The immediate areas of possible cooperation were identified as demining, military medicine and flood control. A 'door' was now opened for such cooperation, it was said.

No official confirmation was immediately available about whether or not Mr. Cohen discussed the question of a possible compensation by Washington to Hanoi for the harm caused to Vietnamese nationals by the chemicals that the U.S. forces had used during the war.

However, Vietnam was known to be concerned about the effects of 'Agent Orange' in particular, though Mr. Cohen's interlocutors let an impression prevail that Hanoi, too, was looking to the future and not the past in bilateral ties.

Encouraged by his 'engagement' with the Vietnamese leaders in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City, Mr. Cohen hinted at the possibility of the U.S. being able to enhance security ties with South-East Asia's key communist State over time through a step-by-step approach. The distant idea, it was indicated, was that the U.S. might be able, only in the long run, to interact with Vietnam with an intensity which at present imbued Washington's relations with Japan and several South-East Asian nations such as Thailand and the Philippines. However, according to some analysts, the U.S.-Japan experience of an old enmity turning into a new strategic nexus might not be easily applicable to the Washington-Hanoi equation. Unlike Japan in World War II, Hanoi did not lose the Vietnam War, it is said.

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Cohen's historic trip to Vietnam

REUTERS

HANOI, March 13. — US defence secretary William Cohen kicked off an historic visit to Vietnam today with wide-ranging talks with his counterpart that an US official described as "incredibly comfortable".

The US ambassador to Vietnam, Mr Pete Peterson, said Mr Cohen and General Pham Van Tra discussed possible military cooperation and search and rescue operations.

Mr Cohen also referred to joint efforts to account for the some 2,000 US servicemen listed as missing in action from the Vietnam war as a "partnership", Mr Peterson said.

"I would characterise the meeting as very cordial, very comfortable," Mr Peterson said. "It (the exchange) was rather free-wheeling, without reading from notes. It was incredibly comfortable."

Mr Cohen, who later briefly met Prime Minister Phan Van Khai, is the first US defence secretary to visit Vietnam since the end of the Vietnam War in 1975 in which the US-backed south Vietnam fell to the



Mr William Cohen at a meeting with Vietnamese Prime Minister Phan Van Khai, at Hanoi on Monday. — APIPTI

Communist north.

His March 13-15 trip coincides with two months of events across the south-east Asian nation to mark the 25th anniversary of the end of that conflict on 30 April.

Mr Peterson said Mr Cohen's visit signalled a new phase in relations between Hanoi and Washington, who only normalised diplomatic ties in 1995. "This today was a real step and what I felt is a maturity in this relationship," said Mr Peterson, a former US pilot who spent more than six years in the "Hanoi Hilton" prison after his jet fighter was shot down in 1966 during the Vietnam War.