

APEC and politics

By P. S. Suryanarayana

10-12 8/12

IT IS now a diplomatic norm in multi-lateral economic summitry that contemporary political concerns of the major participants determine the ambience of the deliberations. The latest summit of the forum for Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), held in Brunei, was no exception. The APEC forum's political outreach on this occasion was defined by the question of taming a 'rogue state', North Korea. The prime poser was how could the U.S. engage its 'Stalinist' ruler, Mr. Kim Jong Il, in an optimistic bid to reduce his 'missile threat' to the global order in general and the Asia-Pacific geopolitical configuration in particular.

In the event, the issue was left hanging fire. The pluses and minuses of Washington's engagement with Pyongyang at the highest political echelon remain to be evaluated more thoroughly before the outgoing U.S. President, Mr. Bill Clinton, can decide whether to travel to North Korea for a personal summitry aimed at snuffing out 'communism' in one of its residual bastions. The question is of building a U.S.-fabricated bridge to North Korea. This is somewhat akin to the search by a former U.S. President, Richard Nixon, for an 'open sesame' formula to draw out China in the early 1970s. The only difference is that Mr. Clinton is being much more transparent compared to Nixon's secret diplomacy. For the present, however, the Brunei summit came under the political shadow of North Korea. As a result, the unfinished delineation of the APEC zone's geopolitical contours has come into a much sharper focus.

The politicisation of the APEC ambience is often accomplished in the public domain and on the margins of the economic deliberations. This does not, therefore, affect the inevitably slow process of consensus-making on global trade issues of direct concern to the APEC members. The ground reality, though, is that the political confabulations have overshadowed the economic agenda at the recent summits. The diplomatic mood at the latest summit, not hampered by Seattle-style protests over the injustices of the glob-

alisation process, was defined largely by the Korean political question.

Mr. Clinton discussed this with several leaders including his South Korean counterpart, Mr. Kim Dae-jung. The U.S.-orchestrated consensus, not involving China, was that North Korea must be defanged as an aspiring merchant of ballistic missiles, which Pyongyang would like to make and test-fire. The security-related sensitivities of Japan as also South Korea and other U.S.-friendly South East Asian states in regard to North Korea could thus be addressed. The overriding parameter spelt out by Mr. Clinton was that these efforts should be harmonised with the

could do beyond making an ardent appeal. This year, Mr. Clinton has said, about his talks with Mr. Jiang, that the U.S. and China have made progress in the past several years on the global nuclear non-proliferation agenda. Now, the Nuclear Club does not include either India or Pakistan despite their demonstrated prowess in making the relevant weapons. And, the Club denies to those outside its portals the very right it cites for possessing nuclear weapons on the basis of a variant of the Churchillian logic about waging wars — there is no sense in making atomic bombs only a political purpose.

Two other political issues suffused Mr.

Political confabulations have overshadowed the economic agenda at the more recent APEC summits.

South Korean leader's current efforts under his 'sunshine policy' to sketch out a new *modus vivendi* with Pyongyang. Addressed tangentially was the danger that North Korea's missile-related ambitions could pose to other countries such as India, given its perceived proclivity to transfer the devices to Pakistan. India is not a member of the APEC club, the reason having much to do with New Delhi's lackadaisical economic policies at the time of the forum's formation eight years ago.

India, however, often figures in the exchanges among the APEC leaders. At last year's APEC summit in Auckland, Mr. Clinton suggested to the Chinese President, Mr. Jiang Zemin, that they discuss the "problems in South Asia" — a diplomatic euphemism for the vagaries of the India-Pakistan equation — as an intrinsic part of the U.S.-China dialogue on global arms control issues. The U.S. wanted to "get them (the Chinese) to cut off nuclear (armament) cooperation with Pakistan". But China took the line that both India and Pakistan should exercise nuclear arms-related restraint and hinted that there was nothing much that Beijing itself

Clinton's talks with the other APEC leaders in Brunei this year. The U.S. is keen to determine the elasticity of North Korea's abilities to make, deploy and perhaps even use long-range ballistic missiles. It needs to know this to decide whether to proceed with its plans for a national missile defence shield against possible attacks by terrorists and 'rogue' nations (if not also potential political competitors such as Russia). Mr. Clinton's new 'gain' in talks with Mr. Jiang in Brunei was China's latest promise of restraint in missile export. The politics of China's imminent entry into the World Trade Organisation is a prime U.S. concern. Guided until not long ago by "the new emperors", Mao and Deng, Beijing now embraces free international trade and thereby eclipses the glow of Edgar Snow's red star over China.

Last year's APEC summit in Auckland was memorable for Mr. Clinton's dramatic learning curve and firm decision-making about East Timor's political freedom from Indonesia. Juridically at that time, East Timor was still a disputed province of Indonesia, although its people had just then, in a U.N.-sponsored vote, rejected

autonomy as an alternative to independence. Impinging on the deliberations were also the geostrategic interests of Australia and New Zealand, two 'Asiatic' Anglo-Saxon members of the APEC forum. Following their intense interaction with the U.S. at the highest political echelons, Indonesia upheld the APEC spirit of fraternity and, before the Auckland summit ended, agreed to allow a U.N. peace force into East Timor ahead of its formal 'constitutional' removal from Jakarta's suzerainty.

The APEC summit in Kuala Lumpur in 1998 was marked by a public American rebuke of the host — the Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohammad — for his alleged 'authoritarianism'. Mr. Clinton had stayed away from that summit to deal with a period-specific manifestation of the intransigence of Mr. Saddam Hussein's Iraq over U.N. weapons inspections. In the event, the U.S. Vice-President, Mr. Al Gore, sought to portray Dr. Mahathir as a virtual Saddam Hussein in the making. Mr. Gore backed the calls for 'reform' being raised at that time by the deposed Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mr. Anwar Ibrahim. Mr. Gore's action appalled America's Anglo-Saxon allies within the APEC and hurt the pride of ordinary Malaysians too.

The 1998 summit was noteworthy for the 'Gorespeak' on globalisation of politics as an inter-related variant of the internationalisation of the market place. Although the catch-phrase — globalisation of politics — was avoided, there was no mistaking the intent. While democracy is certainly a political virtue worth propagating internationally, the Gore campaign on that occasion was hampered by the extraordinary political diversity within the APEC forum. Moreover, Mr. Gore had committed the elementary mistake of equating Vietnam's version of *perestroika*, namely *doi moi*, with the then vibrant calls for reform or *reformasi* in Indonesia and Malaysia (these being a people-initiated variant of *glasnost*). But it requires much more than a hectoring speech to prove the point that democracy is the springboard for economic progress within individual states.

THE HINDU

8 DEC 2000

APEC split on WTO talks

Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei, November 13

ECONOMIC AND trade ministers from Pacific rim nations on Monday struggled for a compromise over when and how new world trade talks should be launched.

The Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum was divided over whether to urge a new round of World Trade Organization (WTO) talks for 2001 - a date that might not be met and could undermine the group's credibility - or to issue a more vague call for a meeting some time soon.

The future leader of the WTO shifted his previous stance favoring a round in 2001 and said that he has urged the ministers to avoid a deadline that might be missed due to deep acrimony over trade issues.

"I have suggested that maybe we should not target a date," said Thai trade minister Supachai Panitchpakdi, who will take over as head of the World Trade Organization in 2002. "Ultimately, it's possible that a date might be avoided."

The ministers were in the final day of preparing a common declaration that would be used as the basis for a summit of APEC's national leaders starting on Wednesday. It will be Bill Clinton's last as US president.

21 APEC economies represent more than half the world's output, but the trade grouping has been criticized as being too unwieldy and slow at meeting voluntary goals of creating a free-trade zone by 2020. (AP)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

14 NOV 2000

HD-1
APEC Ministers
call for new
round of talks

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN (BRUNEI), NOV. 13. Pacific rim Ministers today called for a new round of global trade negotiations with an agenda that takes into account the needs of developing countries.

The agreement came after the Foreign and Trade Ministers from the 21 members of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum struggled for two days in Brunei to bridge a gap between the needs and goals of rich and poor nations in the new global economy.

The Ministers also said current high oil prices threatened economic development, and called for more research into alternative fuels. Yesterday, the OPEC oil-producing nations rejected an increase in oil production and discussed slashing output early next year to keep prices from falling too fast.

The U.S., Australia, Japan and other APEC members had called for new World Trade Organisation talks by next year. But poorer countries derailed that move during the talks leading up to this annual APEC summit. — AP

THE HINDU

1 0 NOV 2000

Apec meet kicks off with offers of free trade & security pledges

BY CHRIS JOHNSON

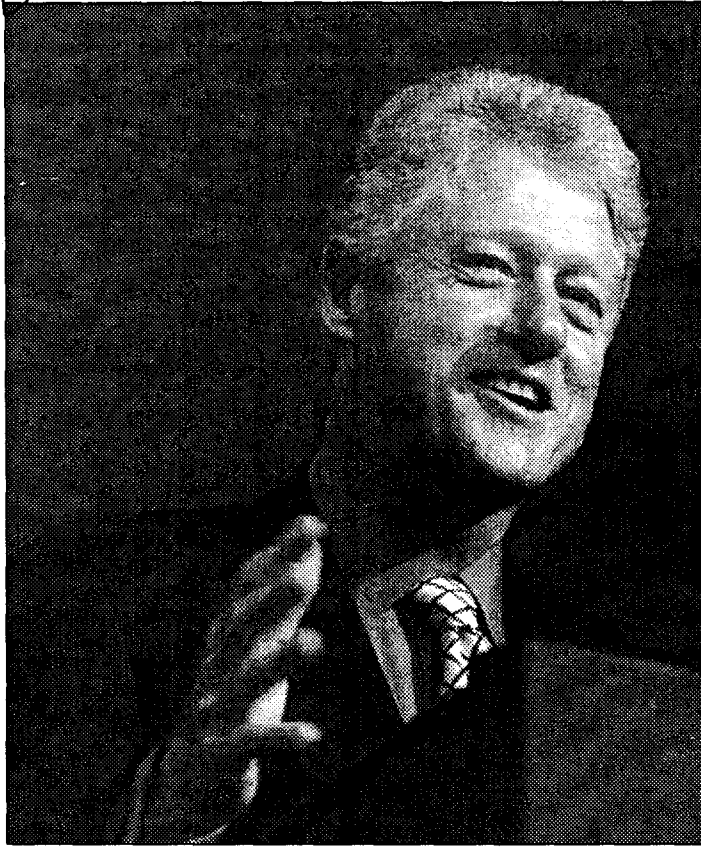
Bandar Seri Begawan, Nov. 15: Leaders of the Pacific Rim kicked off their annual summit on Wednesday with pledges to open markets and make the region safer. Presidents, prime ministers and other leaders from 21 economies with two-thirds of the world's population and more than half its output arrived at the meeting to a traditional Brunei welcome, or "Hadrah", from about 150 young men and women.

Clad head-to-toe in regal purple and white Muslim costumes, dozens of Bruneians lined up to bang small drums as each leader entered the summit venue in the tiny oil-rich sultanate.

The summit, an intensive but fairly informal gathering lasting just over 24 hours, will discuss ways to ease barriers to trade and investment and to share the benefits of the "new economy" offered by the Internet computer revolution.

The huge advances in information technology over the last decade have transformed many of the richer Asia-Pacific nations such as the United States and Singapore, but have left behind many others, such as Papua New Guinea and Vietnam.

Apec leaders say they want to close this "digital divide" and try to improve the living conditions of the hundreds of millions of their people still living below the pover-



TRADE TALKS: US President Bill Clinton addresses the CEO summit at the Empire Hotel while attending the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation annual meeting in Brunei on Wednesday. The President is in Asia for the meeting in Brunei and then departs for a state visit to Vietnam, marking the first visit of an American President to the country since the end of the Vietnam War over two decades ago. (Reuters)

ty line. They also want to make the region a safer and more secure place and minimise risks from possible flashpoints in the region.

Defence and security overshadowed trade and economics ahead of the summit in a series of bilateral meetings of the leaders.

US President Bill Clinton met his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin and was later due to hold talks with South Korean president Kim Dae-jung. Top of the US-Russia agenda were arms control and attempts to make the area safer and more stable, officials said.

PERMANENT, NOT PASSING

Clinton will also meet Chinese president Jiang Zemin and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori in one-on-one discussions to be dominated by worries over North Korea, US plans for a regional missile shield for its allies and the status of Taiwan. The US leader told a meeting of business executives Asia was even more important to the United States after the cold war and it remained committed to "this vital part of the world."

"There is no longer any doubt that our link to this region is permanent, not passing," he said.

"Our troops remain here as a force for stability. We have renewed our alliance with Japan. We have worked to preserve the peace in the two likeliest flashpoints of conflict: the Taiwan Strait and the Korean Peninsula." (Reuters)

THE ASIAN AGE

16 NOV 2000

APEC to end trade barriers

BANDAR SERI BEGAWAN (BRUNEI), NOV. 17. Efforts to restart global trade talks, which failed in Seattle last year amid riots, received a push on Thursday when 21 nations of the Asia and Pacific region agreed to set a date of 2001 to form an agenda and begin negotiations for eliminating trade barriers.

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The agreement reached by leaders of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, or APEC, was a victory for the Clinton administration, which has made free trade a top priority and has often used this Pacific Rim forum to press its free trade agenda.

Thursday's accord ensures that no matter who wins the White House, or who succeeds other departing leaders of APEC, a mandate and deadline have been set for reviving trade talks. "We believe that a balanced and sufficiently broad-based agenda that responds to the interests and concerns of all World Trade Organisation members should be formulated and finalized as soon as possible in 2001, and that a round be launched in 2001," the leaders said in a statement. But

the agreement amounted to little more than a consensus that the talks must restart. It did not address the subject that blew up the Seattle meeting, the fears among developing nations that the United States would impose labour and environmental standards that would undercut the competitiveness of poorer nations.

Saying they were tired of being railroaded into agreements that were not in their best interest, the developing nations, led by Malaysia, initially insisted on seeing an agenda before agreeing to a fixed starting date for negotiations. After two days of heated debate, mainly by United States and Brunei leaders, a compromise was reached that both the agenda and initiation of talks would be completed by next year. It was the first time that the group had met in this oil-rich sultanate of 300,000 people who have one of the highest standards of living in South-east Asia, but are governed by an absolute monarchy, the Sultan Hassan al-Bolkiah.

Known for his gilded palaces, fleets of luxury cars and other excesses, the sultan, in a speech to

delegates, warned that "disparities between the rich and poor continue to grow, and many people are at risk of being marginalised." Still, the sultan treated the regional Heads of State to ornate pins of gold and precious stones and in keeping with an APEC tradition, matching wacky shirts — the color was deep blue this year.

For Mr. Clinton, who is widely recognised as having been the driving force behind the group, the forum marked what was likely his last meeting with many world leaders.

On Thursday, Mr. Clinton met separately with the Japanese Prime Minister, Mr. Yoshirō Mori, and the Chinese President, Mr. Jiang Zemin. Aides to Mr. Clinton said in his meeting with Mr. Mori, the two leaders mainly discussed the situation in North Korea, but that the President also expressed opposition to Japan's stepped-up whaling activities. White House aides said Mr. Clinton discussed nonproliferation issues with the Chinese leader, and aides indicated a significant development was in the works. — *New York Times*

THE HINDU

18 NOV 2000

✓ Pacific blues

THE JUST concluded summit of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Brunei proved a lacklustre affair. That the 21 leaders chose to wear blue shirts in the traditional photo line-up was unintentionally symbolic. APEC has been in the doldrums since the Asian currency crisis left many members too scared to take further trade liberalising steps. The forum's final statement was bland. The leaders agreed to piece together a broad-based agenda by next year and called for a new round of world trade talks. APEC's paralysis reflects a state of drift in the multilateral trading system as a whole. After the Seattle debacle, the World Trade Organisation cannot pursue a new round of trade talks until Washington gets a new President. As is always the case when international trade diplomacy is stalled, creeping protectionism is now spreading across the globe. APEC has been doubly hit by these developments. Its membership is large and unwieldy. There are large internal disparities. Members include dysfunctional economies like Russia's to trade powerhouses like China and the United States. It is hard to get a consensus when the going is good. When things are blue, APEC gets mired in the sort of sharp exchanges seen in Brunei between wary Malaysia and gungho Australia.

India talks of becoming an APEC member one day. A more pressing matter is New Delhi's unacknowledged stake in the multilateral trading system. With the WTO and APEC on ice, countries are signing ever more one-on-one free trade agreements. For example, Singapore has signed such bilateral agreements with 17 of APEC's 21 members in the past one year alone. Specialised trade groupings are also increasing. The US, Brunei, Singapore, Chile and New Zealand recently signed an open skies agreement in civil aviation.

These are not irrelevant to India's future. India is not a member of any regional trade group: the economic component of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation is non-existent. It does not have a trade agreement with any major trading partner. New Delhi has difficulty in concluding agreements with minor trading partners like Sri Lanka and Nepal. Much more than most countries, India is dependent on the multilateral trading system and its rough and ready principle of trade access for everyone. The inconclusive APEC summit in Brunei is a sign of a growing drift in global trade diplomacy which should command more concern in India than it does.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 NOV 2000

EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ADVOCACY

UNARGUABLY, THE THRUST to find common cause with non-disability groups in creating an accessible tourism environment for all is the most noteworthy feature of the first Asia Pacific Conference on Tourism for persons with disabilities held in Bali. "Universal tourism", or "tourism for all", was the plea issued to Governments, the voluntary sector and industry; urging them to take suitable steps to ensure that people, regardless of age, gender and abilities, have greater access to tourism facilities. This spirit is reflected in the Bali Declaration which emphasises respect for the equal rights not only of persons with disabilities, but also of elderly persons and families with children for access to tourism facilities and services with other consumers. According to the World Tourism Organisation, about 12 to 15 per cent of the potential travelling public, one in every seven travellers, has some form of temporary or permanent disability. Moreover, people are not only different from each other in the abilities they possess, but the level of functioning varies through different stages in each individual's life. There are, therefore, valid moral and material reasons to make the enterprise of tourism more inclusive.

That accessible tourism services for people with disabilities are almost non-existent is but a truism in a general scenario where guarantees to more basic requirements such as quality education, health care and rehabilitation services are highly inadequate. This larger reality is not, however, something that can easily be wished away when we begin thinking of expanding tourism for the disabled. This is because the increase in disposable incomes and the burgeoning of tourists in many countries today owes to the growth in employment and increase in lifespan. The corresponding share

of the disabled in these respects must be by any standard considerably less and this directly relates to their general level of education and employment. Therefore, one cannot escape the question whether the creation of an accessible tourist environment for the disabled should take precedence over efforts to improve far more basic needs. One must also remember that barriers to physical access *per se* have been recognised as an area of concern only in the last decade or so, owing at least in part to the shift in thinking away from institutionalised care. But this has not concomitantly generated the requisite measure of sensitivity to the fact that the need for a barrier-free environment is more real than ever before.

17/10 HD-12
There is no denying the importance of placing the issue on the public agenda of the region, both in view of the rights of relevant groups to accessible tourism and the palpable lack of demonstrable public recognition of this fact. All the same, we cannot lose sight of the fact that the endeavour to promote barrier-free tourism is but only a small part of a larger vision to create a barrier-free environment for the disabled. Only as part of this larger picture could tourism ever have meaning and relevance for them. The broader vision must encompass the entire range of human life and activity, since, at least in theory, it is generally recognised that people ought not to be denied access on grounds of disability. In such a scenario, prioritising the arenas to improve access will inevitably be contested and decisions will have to be left to democratic deliberation, with due regard for local requirements. Tourist resorts could very well be high among the access priorities in Australia; it may be public transport that should receive impetus, say, in India.

THE HINDU

17 OCT 2000

A POSITIVE SIGNAL

APEC forum 10/12

INDIA'S ADMISSION INTO the Council for Security Cooperation in Asia Pacific (CSCAP), as a national member, comes as yet another welcome signal from the region for enhanced interaction with New Delhi. Barely two years ago, the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum chose to leave out India while expanding its membership. Russia, Peru and Vietnam were taken into the fold and its membership frozen again for another 10 years. That was unfortunate not only for India, but for APEC too. Now that the after-effects of Pokhran-II have died down and the Indo-American dialogue has acquired a new dimension, it comes as no surprise that New Delhi is being welcomed into CSCAP now. Though it is only a second-track forum for both academics and officials from major countries in the Asia Pacific region, the Council provides a real testing ground for new initiatives and thought processes. Invariably, think-tanks from the CSCAP countries bounce their ideas here before taking them into the formal or official platforms, the Asean Regional Forum (ARF) for instance. Many retired diplomats, strategic analysts and academics dealing with security issues use this forum to keep in touch with developments in the region. It provides an ideal vehicle for informal exchanges and consultations.

The CSCAP leaves out the Indochina countries, except for Vietnam, and does not include Latin America either. ASEAN and APEC are at the core of this, on the second track. With the U.S., China, the European Union and Japan already in it, the Council provides a useful platform to discuss security related issues without political or Governmental inhibitions. Since the Governments will be sending in their national delegation to participate in the deliberations, it has a quasi-official status. Though India is already a part of the ARF, its entry into CSCAP was consid-

ered essential to keep track of the developments at the informal level. It will now be possible to play a role in shaping the discussions at that stage before an issue is pushed up to the official or ministerial level for deliberation. A whole range of security problems continue to cause concern to Governments in the region — from Kashmir and Jaffna, to Indonesia, the Koreas and more recently the coups in a couple of the South Pacific islands. This is in addition to the festering dispute on territorial claims over some of the Spratly islands in the South China Sea, the cross-straits tensions between China and Taiwan and the resurgence of pan-Islamic fundamentalism as well as militancy in parts of Indonesia and the Philippines.

Instead of always leaving it to Governments to handle some of these sensitive issues, it does help to discuss the emerging problems or security threats at an informal level which would facilitate new ideas or approaches. For instance, Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines have to jointly deal with the problem of Islamic militancy. Rather than have Governments directly confront the problems, strategists and academics may be in a better position to go into the real issues and come up with solutions that can then be presented to Governments. From India's viewpoint, membership of CSCAP provides another entry point into the Asia Pacific platform. Without being obsessed with the 'low profile' approach to regional and international fora, the Indian delegation to the Council must be able to make its participation effective and productive — not only presenting a national perspective on issues, but trying to understand the import of all the regional issues or problems. The admission into CSCAP clearly shows that India is being taken seriously and will have an increasingly larger role to play in regional and international bodies.

10 JUN 2000