

Why EU matters

Monday, October 23, 2006

India can benefit in trade and investment by strengthening relations with the 25-nation European Union, says Claude Arpi

Years of research in Indian foreign policy have convinced me that during his 17-year tenure as Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru's worst blunder was to have kept the foreign affairs portfolio with himself. Even if Nehru had been a genius at diplomacy - the unnecessary reference of the Kashmir issue to the UN in December 1947 proves that he was certainly not - no person can be the Prime Minister of a nation like India and at the same time do justice to the foreign policy of the country.

Nehru thought otherwise and India has paid - and is still paying - the price. It is unfortunate that Mr Manmohan Singh, whatever his compulsions are, and I have no doubt that there are many, continues to hold the dual job of Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. The recent bungle in Havana and later the Shashi Tharoor fiasco are recurring proofs that it is high time to have a well-thought of foreign policy with a full time Minister.

One of the problems of the UPA Government is its over-dependency on two contradictory factors: One external, the United States, and the other one internal, the Communists. The trip to Havana for an irrelevant Non-Aligned Movement heads of Government meeting and the midnight kiss to the old Cuban dictator was probably a way to pacify the comrades.

For months, Indian diplomacy has been courting the Bush Administration for a nuclear deal, which may never see the light of day. Delhi was under the

impression that it had finally managed to woo the Washington and that strategic partnership between India and the US was now something very 'natural'.

Two small incidents proved that it was not so. First, Washington vetoed Mr Shashi Tharoor's candidature for the post of the UN Secretary-General. Second, Gen Pervez Musharraf's recent visit to the US, which shows that he is still the natural partner of the US. Robert Pollock in The Wall Street Journal calls him 'America's favourite dictator'. He wrote: "The Bush Administration seems to consider the Pakistani general an indispensable ally. ...Democrats and foreign policy thinkers of the 'realist' school seem equally comfortable with the idea of Gen Musharraf running Pakistan for the indefinite future."

Mr Pollock recalls a "meeting of the Gen Musharraf fan club that took place at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York, where general gave brief remarks and took questions" on his book In the Line of Fire. He was "treated to standing ovations that exceeded mere politeness as he entered and left the hall. Not one questioner raised the issue of democracy." This is a hard fact. That is why the recent visit of Mr Manmohan Singh to Helsinki and his meeting not only with Matti Vanhanen, the Prime Minister of Finland (which holds the rotating presidency of the European Union), but also the European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso, EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana and Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson, assume a new 'strategic' importance.

The occasion was the seventh EU-India summit. While thanking his host in Helsinki, the Prime Minister boldly stated: "Consolidation of strategic partnership and intensification of dialogue with the EU has been a priority of our Government's foreign policy."

Is it only a declaration of good intentions or a new orientation of Indian foreign policy? If the latter is true, it is a welcome initiative. The Prime Minister acknowledged: "India and the EU are indispensable pillars of a new multi-polar

world order. We have both the will and the capability to make meaningful contributions for meeting the challenges of managing global inter-dependence."

The concepts of 'multi-polar order' and 'global inter-dependence' have certainly far-reaching implications than the outdated 'non-alignment' policy, which means nothing in today's world. Europe itself is a living example of a multi-polar exercise. In March 2007, the EU will celebrate 50 years of the Treaty of Rome, which set the base for the European community by establishing a common market and an economic and monetary union. But the major hurdle towards a deeper relationship between India and Europe and thus a new step towards the creation of a multi-polar world is the lack of knowledge and understanding in India about the European Union 'process'. I was recently in Delhi to prepare an exhibition on Jean Monnet, the father of Europe. Whenever I spoke about Monnet's vision 'to unite men', I was shocked to see how very few in the capital knew who Monnet was. Though, he did influence the political thinking in Europe after World War II, more than Charles de Gaulle or Winston Churchill, he remains unknown in India. True, de Gaulle told Nehru in September 1962 that he hoped to "conclude economic, political and cultural arrangements between the Atlantic and the Ural," but he never believed in the concept of supranationality advocated by Monnet.

After the Helsinki summit, the French paper *Le Figaro* noted: "Today (in India), on the geopolitical level, the EU does not weigh more than South Africa ...from Delhi's point of view, one has to acknowledge that Europe leaves everyone more or less indifferent." It need not be so.

For the interesting point for India lies in Europe's 'fusion of sovereignty': The 'national' sovereignty is delegated to a common authority (the European Commission or Parliament) which is authorised to take decisions on behalf of its 25 member states. On issues like trade negotiations, the great advantage is that Delhi can deal with 25 nations in one time. This has greatly contributed to

the EU emerging as India's largest trading partner and the second largest source for FDI. Unfortunately, though India has joined as a full partner country the ITER Project on fusion power and will soon be part of the Galileo Global Satellite Project, progress is still slow in other fields.