

# India, Facing Huge Challenges, Will Host a Depleted American President

by Ramtanu Maitra

Oct. 29—By the time President Barack Obama arrives in Mumbai on Nov. 6, India will be hosting an American President who has just suffered a massive electoral reversal at the Nov. 2 midterm elections. The electoral results will not be a surprise to most, since, during his two years in the White House, Obama's inability, or what many would call his unwillingness, to respond to the economic collapse that has made millions of Americans homeless, and millions more jobless, has led to Washington's loss of trust and confidence among a vast majority of Americans.

New Delhi must realize that it will be entertaining an American President who is obsessed with his own political survival. Some would describe his post-Nov. 2 status as that of a "lame duck" President. Nonetheless, Obama—while facing the wrath of his own electorate, and with his Presidency wobbly, and without a focus—will be representing the United States, one of the four most powerful nations on Earth. It is therefore necessary that New Delhi confront the American President, in no uncertain terms, with the reality of the crises that the world faces today, and what will be required to stabilize the financial and security situations. If the United States participates in this effort, over a period of time, with the technologies and manpower that it can bring to bear, conditions can be created to abolish poverty from the face of this Earth.

## Global Financial Collapse

To begin with, New Delhi's prime concern should be to make clear to Obama that its own economic growth is linked directly to the global economy. Over the years, India has moved out of its low-growth, self-sustaining economic and financial world, and is now very much a part of the global economic and financial system. But that integration has taken place at the expense of creating a number of vulnerabilities—a causal effect of globalization. Billions of hot dollars flowing

out of developed nations seeking an extra margin of usurious profit in the unregulated emerging markets have pushed up inflation in both India and China—the two fastest growing large economies. Such inflation not only destroys a nation's currency reserves in the long run, but more importantly, causes unmanageable crisis conditions for hundreds of millions of poor who live in India and China, the two most populous nations on Earth.

The process has gotten worse since the Obama Administration chose to bail out the Wall Street and City of London investment bankers and speculators, instead of channeling the money to sectors creating productive jobs. This anti-people policy only helped to relieve a fraction of speculators' colossal debt, while indebting the productive sectors further. As the economic situation in the United States deteriorated, Obama continued to bail out the failed and corrupt Wall Street institutions, further debilitating the productive sectors of America.

On Obama's watch, America's debt burden has grown so big that not even a fraction of it can ever be paid back. A large chunk of taxpayers' money is now being channeled to pay back those debts. Tax revenue is stagnating or shrinking, because of long-term high unemployment, put in place by a policy led from the White House during these two years. New Delhi must make clear to Obama that unless the U.S. economy is put back on track, because of the globalization of financial institutions, the policy exercised by his Administration will stop growth everywhere, leading to an overall collapse of all the economies of the world.

## Chaos in Afghanistan and Pakistan

The second subject of discussion with the American President should be the threats the unfocused and unending war in Afghanistan has posed to the Eurasian region. Since the U.S.-NATO invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, Washington has gone about fighting a war



Tehri Dam/Arvind Iyer

*India, like China and Russia, is at a crossroads: Despite significant achievements, like the Tehri Dam on the Bhagirathi River (left), the vast majority of the Indian people suffer crushing poverty (below). Unless the United States dramatically changes direction, including dumping the increasingly autistic President Obama, there is little chance that the nations of Eurasia will succeed.*

without clearly defining who the enemy is, and what the U.S. wants to achieve by carrying out a seemingly unending and costly war. Unless those objectives are clear, the future of India's neighborhood remains wholly uncertain.

At the time Afghanistan was invaded, the stated objectives of the United States were to find the alleged perpetrator of 9/11, Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda group of terrorists, dismantle the ruling Islamic fundamentalist Taliban regime in Kabul, and set up a stable democratic regime in Afghanistan. In order to achieve these objectives, Washington sought the military help of many countries. Some of them responded guardedly, while others, such as India, did not.

Nine years later, it has become evident that none of the three objectives can be met. Some in Washington continue to claim that the objectives can be met only if the United States and NATO remain engaged in Afghanistan for decades to come. However, such claims are not based on realities on the ground, or even an explanation as to why a long stay, by hundreds of thousands of foreign troops, armed to the teeth, will bring about such an orderly transformation, something which Afghanistan has never experienced in its entire history. This scenario is, instead, based on vacuous words,



WHO/P. Viroit

whose intent is, perhaps, to maintain the status quo, i.e., endless warfare and a strong military presence in the neighborhood of three powerful nations—Russia, China, and India.

However, what the nine years of war in Afghanistan, which has now spilled over into the western frontiers of Pakistan, have achieved so far, is to spread religious radicalism, in the form of Talibanism. This radicalism is no longer based only in Afghanistan, but is now threatening India, Russia, and China, the entirety of Central Asia, as well as Iran and Pakistan. The presence of 150,000 U.S. and NATO soldiers has allowed the jihadis of the world to congregate.

The jihadis have been organized by Britain and Saudi Arabia, and are now located in the tribal areas of Pakistan, where Islamabad's writ does not extend. While the United States had been the magnet in attracting these terrorists/jihadis, Washington has no capability to disperse them. Long before the Afghan War winds down, be that years or decades from now, these jihadis

will engage in destroying the region, pitching terrorist-organized religious and sectarian warfare.

Furthermore, the United States and NATO have not only drawn these jihadis in to settle in the region, they have also provided them with their source of income to arm and train. While a significant amount of the cash that nourishes the jihadis comes from various charities based in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, a large portion of this money is generated by the opium explosion that took place in Afghanistan since the foreign occupation of Afghanistan began in 2001. Afghanistan, which produced less than 700 tons of opium before the Russian invasion in 1979, saw the opium production grow to 8,200 tons under the watch of the British and the Americans. The year 2009 is considered a lean opium season in Afghanistan, and yet, the opium production will be close to 5,000 tons, which amounts to what all the drug addicts in the world could consume in a year, and still have some left over for a rainy day.

In addition to the funding of the jihadis and explosion of opium and heroin addiction in the region, stretching from Iran to Russia, and Azerbaijan to India, the rapid growth of colossal opium production in Afghanistan has corrupted most of the institutions and banks in particular, as well as the purveyors of these institutions around the region. Many law enforcement officials, surviving on low wages, have become recipients of bundles of opium money, used generously to corrupt them. In other words, the opium explosion in Afghanistan has not only created victims and killers, but has caused the degeneration of a whole range of individuals and institutions not always visible to the untrained eye.

### **Stabilizing Afghanistan: Agro-Industrial Development**

The most fundamental benefit of a successful modern agricultural sector lies in what it builds into the nation. To begin with, it requires power, water, sufficient manpower, development of agro-industries, and a transportation network. A successful agricultural sector needs concerted efforts, and if the importance of the sector is fully understood, and developed in-depth, it acts as a shield against external manipulation. The process itself develops skilled manpower.

Basic agricultural institutions include research and extension services that create agronomists who live in the country, and work to develop high-yield varieties of seeds and to improve undernourished land. Develop-

ment of water resources, which includes irrigation and water supply to the agro-industries and the population in general, also produces engineers and technicians who build dams, canals, and flood plains. These acts themselves protect the soil, the land, and the environment. In this effort, Russia, China, and India, in particular, along with the United States, could play a significant role.

### **Security of Eurasia**

In addition, what New Delhi must point out to the visiting President Obama, is the growing necessity for India and its Eurasian neighbors, to secure the region. Eurasia supports almost 60% of the world's people, but many hundreds of millions of them have remained victims of utter poverty. China and India, which together account for almost 2.5 billion people, are now engaged in building up their nations, removing the poverty that exists, and making efforts to provide future generations with a better life and the opportunities that come with it.

In this context, what is required is the integration of the Eurasian landmass, through transportation infrastructure, generation of abundant power, management of water, ensuring food security through advancement of modern agriculture and steady supply of raw materials. China has already embarked on building high-speed railroads with the intent of connecting the nations of Eurasian. Both India and China are developing their respective blue water navies in order to ensure safe passage of imports and exports. Both nations require bulk supplies of raw materials, on a regular basis, to keep the development moving forward.

In all this, the United States can, and should, play an important role. On the other hand, pursuing the geopolitical policy that the United States had exercised throughout the Cold War days will not only create serious rifts within the Eurasian nations, but could lead to the brink of world war.

In other words, with the rise of China, India, and Russia, and the willingness among the three to optimize their capabilities in all possible areas of economic activities, has ushered in a situation whereby a participatory role of the United States could act as a glue to the developmental efforts and bring about a stable world. Such participation of the United States in stabilizing the Eurasian landmass will, in no time, bring in Japan, South Korea, and some European nations, with their technological capabilities, to expedite the process.