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Chen to face realities of new government

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THE Taiwanese people elected Chen Shui-bian as the new President of Taiwan. He advocates independence for Taiwan. It is obvious that the majority of Taiwanese people want to be on their own.

But it is quite unlikely that China would allow them to be independent. They will eventually have to be content with more autonomy such as that enjoyed by the people of Hong Kong.

In Indonesia there are many provinces which would like to become independent states. But nations cannot allow secession of the provinces because there will be more demands and in the end the nations will break up and will be succeeded by numerous small and non-viable states, which can be exploited by foreign powers.

We experienced something similar in Malaysia. When we were trying to form Malaysia in 1963, we had hoped Brunei would join.

Brunei is very rich because of the oil that it produces. Brunei naturally expected to retain its oil wealth if it joined Malaysia.

But this would be contrary to the Malaysian Government policy. In the end Brunei did not join Malaysia as the terms were not suitable for it. This is of course not quite like demanding for independence but clearly local sensitivities can become an impediment to unity.

Relations between Brunei and Malaysia became strained after this. Brunei suspected that Malaysia was fomenting unrest because several Brunei dissidents had been given asylum in Malaysia. It took a long time for the rift to be healed.

Singapore was very bullish about joining Malaysia as the PAP Government hoped to be accepted as a part of the Central Government. But the Alliance Government refused to share power with the PAP which was not a member of the Alliance.

The PAP then launched a campaign for equal rights for all Malaysians irrespective of racial origins. This would result in the indigenous Malays and others becoming the deprived in their own country.

Using the slogan Malaysian Malaysia the PAP tried to agitate the Chinese population to reject the socio political contract between the races entered into during the struggle for independence in which the special position of the indigenous people was recognised by the Chinese and Indians.

As a result of the PAP campaign the relation between the Malays and the Chinese became very tense. There were demonstrations by the Malays in Singapore.

In the end the Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, decided that Singapore with its largely Chinese population was not compatible with Malaysia's spirit of sharing between the different races and Singapore was expelled.

The expulsion of Singapore from Malaysia is not quite the same as secession but it does show that people usually think largely of their own interest and not of the whole nation.

The fact that they may be of the same race or origin does not necessarily make them want to stay united, to help each other and to strengthen the nation. They would rather have a small nation where their own interest is upheld than be a part of a strong big nation.

I suppose it is the same in Taiwan. On the one hand, the Taiwanese people feel that they are Chinese. On the other hand, they don't want to

lose control of the better life that they now have in Taiwan.

Maybe China's one nation two systems can provide a solution. It seems to have worked in Hong Kong. Whatever the solution it is up to the Chinese people to decide.

As far as Malaysia is concerned, the fact that there is a new government in Taiwan, which is much more pro-independence than was the previous government, does not mean that we will abandon our support for the One-China policy.

We have always regarded Taiwan as a part of China. It is a fact of history. It so happens that the Nationalists retreated to Taiwan, and that cannot change the fact of geo-political history.

The Nationalists also retreated to northern Thailand and Burma but China has not claimed sovereignty over these territories.

Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji delivered a strong message before the election that China will use any means to stop the separatists. It was difficult for Zhu to say otherwise as that may be taken to indicate that it was prepared to abandon its one-China policy. He cannot be seen to be tolerating the setting up of two Chinas.

From the regional point of view if there are two Chinas, there will always be tension. Whatever the policies of the new administration in Taiwan Malaysia will not recognise it as an independent country. We will regard it as a trading entity and our relations will be based on that.

I met Lee Teng-hui once in the late 1980s when I went to Taiwan. Like all politicians I believe he had to pander to domestic politics even though he knew that Taiwan's independence is not compatible with the realities outside of the country.

In the end his candidate was rejected by the Taiwanese even though his stand had annoyed the mainland Chinese. But it must be admitted that the Kuomintang (Nationalist) Party did a good job developing Taiwan economically. Lee can take some of the credit for this.

From the beginning Taiwan adopted the free market capitalistic system. There was no central planning as in the mainland where for a long time the Communist ideology and system prevailed. As a result Taiwan prospered and became one of the Asian Tigers.

Some of the biggest shipping corporations in the world are owned by Taiwanese, as are some of the most successful industries such as computer manufacturer Acer.

China can benefit a lot from the entrepreneurship and business skills of the Taiwanese. They can help China adjust to the free market system and integrate itself fully with the world's economy.

Chen, may have been elected for his pro-independence stand but now that he has won he will find a need to face reality. All politicians have to modify their stand once they win and shoulder responsibility for the well-being of their country.

Promises can easily be made when you are in the opposition and have no responsibility to carry out the promises. But the rhetorics will have to be abandoned when faced with the realities of running a Government and the country.

I believe that Chen and his party will modify their stand and seek to review their stand on independence.

The problem that will plague the Government of Taiwan will be foreign interference. Outside powers will want to use it to achieve their own national agenda.

It will be in the interest of these powers to see that China and Taiwan remains hostile towards each other. Wishing to retain friends is natural for a country that is isolated but it would be unwise to confront China in furtherance of the policies of others.

For a long time the West carried out a policy of containment against China. That policy has ostensibly been dropped but for many in the West the vision of an economically powerful China is frightening. They would rather have an authoritarian Communist China that is economically weak.

I feel it is quite strange that US President Bill Clinton should go to India and Pakistan at the end of his term. The United States is known to disapprove of Pakistan in particular, and also of India.

Pakistan and India exploded nuclear devices. At the same time, Pakistan has been condemned for the seizure of power by the military. American Presidents do not usually visit the countries whose policies they disapprove.

But apparently this is being done in the context of a bigger foreign policy scenario. It is possible that an attempt is being made to create a power balance in Asia, particularly to curb China.

Of course a lame duck President may do strange things as the in-coming Government will not feel itself bound to whatever an out-going President commits himself to.

We in Asean (The Association of Southeast Asian Nations) would like India and Pakistan to be at peace with each other. But the Kashmir issue will always stand in the way of good relations between the two.

Malaysia does not wish to take sides but we are committed to supporting the UN resolutions on Kashmir. It is expecting too much for two parties to a dispute to resolve it through bilateral negotiations. At some stage a third party must be brought in to arbitrate.

The Kashmir conflict arose historically because of the division of the Indian subcontinent into Pakistan and India. When the ruler of Kashmir failed to join either India or Pakistan, India moved in and claimed a substantial part of Kashmir as Indian territory while Pakistan claimed the rest.

However the Kashmir people had not been consulted. Kashmir is a strange state in which the majority of its people were Muslims but the ruler was a Hindu. The Hindu ruler has been removed by India but the people cannot be removed.

India and Pakistan may want to make compromises but the people of Kashmir will not allow them to. And so Kashmir will remain a bone of contention between India and Pakistan and it is likely to remain so for a very long time.

China would like to join the World Trade Organisation. To be a member of the WTO, China must open up its market, a market of 1.3 billion people. At the moment China has a trade surplus with the US and this is something that the US cannot accept.

The US can accept even less the growth in China's economic strength. Quite obviously military strength will follow economic wealth. This is what has happened with Japan. When in the immediate post-war years Japan was very poor it was thought that limiting Japan's military expenditure to one per cent of GDP would result in Japan being permanently weak.

But the Japanese economy grew beyond the expectations of the West and it became the second richest nation in the world. One per cent of its GDP spent on the military would be bigger than what the UK spends on arms.

Similarly if China becomes rich, even if it spends only a small fraction of its budget on arms, it is going to be very big. This is something that the West will regard with apprehension.

China is also a nuclear power. There is nothing to indicate that it will be less responsible than the Western powers with regard to using nuclear weapons. But then why should it be assumed that Western nuclear powers would be responsible and would not start a nuclear war.

The fact is that nuclear weapons, no matter in whose hands they are,

make everyone nervous and frightened. Nuclear weapons must be banned for the good of mankind as a whole. For as long as some countries possess nuclear weapons, other countries will try to develop and produce nuclear weapons also. Those with nuclear weapons have no moral right to demand that others should not possess similar weapons.

Malaysia is all for a total ban on nuclear weapons. In fact we are not happy with the continuous upgrading of the lethal qualities of the so-called conventional weapons. The cost of these weapons keep on rising as they get more and more sophisticated.

As the rich expand more and more money to develop and produce these weapons they try to recoup their high expenditure by selling these weapons to the countries which are too poor to develop their own weapons. If a country refuses to buy the latest weapons, these will be offered to neighbours or enemies.

Scared of the idea of having militarily powerful neighbours and enemies the country has to buy. Then the neighbours will also buy and they will all be accused of having an arms race. And of course all of them will become poorer as they expand such a high percentage of their budget on arms.

Actually what the world needs is not just a ban on nuclear weapons but also a massive reduction in the expenditure on developing new so-called conventional weapons. The world does not need these weapons. They are a waste of money as they bring no return to anyone.

Malaysia is even against nuclear power plants. We don't think that we have complete knowledge about the dangers of using nuclear power. Accidents happen far too often for comfort.

The best source of renewable energy is hydro-power. Environmentalists should be more reasonable and accept the need to clear some forests in order to develop hydro-electric plants. This is far better than nuclear power plants of uncertain safety or polluting thermal power plants.

General Pervez Musharraf, the Chief Executive of Pakistan made a working visit to Malaysia on March 27-29. I do not like to comment on the internal politics of other countries but I listened carefully to his account of the circumstances leading to his taking over the Government of Pakistan.

Democracy is the best system of Government that has ever been invented but it is not perfect. Failure to understand the weaknesses and the limitations of democracy by the people will affect its performance adversely. Pakistan has experienced military coups three times.

Each time democracy was restored the whole world cheered. But there is nothing to show that Pakistan has done any better as a democracy than it has done under military rule.

General Musharraf promises to return democracy to Pakistan. But he cannot give a date for this to happen because he has to put in place a new system of Government in which the Provinces will have a greater say in provincial governance, reduce corruption and bureaucratic delays and improve the economy. No one can say that all these can be done within a short period of time.

I believe he is sincere in wanting to limit the period of his rule. If everyone, including the political parties co-operate the time taken can be shortened.

But if he is not given the political stability needed for his changes to be made, then he may have to stay in power a much longer time. I wish him all the best in his herculean task.