

NEWS WRAP

AGD

Mrs Hilary Clinton's recent whirlwind tour of China, Bangladesh and India reaffirmed America's spheres of influence. The Chinese foreign ministry declared that the dissident Chen Guangcheng could apply to study outside China, in the same manner as more than 300,000 Chinese students already abroad. Late in April 2012, Mr Chen, a blind lawyer and rights activist, who has exposed abuses under China's one child policy, escaped house arrest in Shangdong Province. The Chinese have agreed to remove unfair subsidies and favourable regulations affecting state owned corporations. Foreigners will be allowed a bigger stake in Chinese securities firms. USA has agreed to back China's efforts to include the Renminbi, China's currency, in the International Monetary Fund's basket of currencies. The IMF has so far not included the Renminbi in its basket of currencies on reserve, as it is not freely convertible.

In Dacca, Mrs Clinton urged the Bangladesh government to refrain from doing anything that could undermine the effectiveness of the internationally acclaimed microlender, Grameen Bank. She also had a meeting with the pioneering bank founder, Mr Muhammad Yunus, who in 2011 was removed from the post of managing director, Grameen Bank, in a dispute over retirement age. The US Secretary of State raised concerns about the recent killing of a labour rights activist, Aminul Islam, and the disappearances of a number of political figures. She has urged the opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party to back down from threats to continue street protest, until Mr Ali, the missing party official returns.

While in Kolkata, Mrs Clinton met the Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee. Last year Ms Banerjee played a major role in opposing India's plans to allow foreign supermarkets to own stakes in Indian businesses. According to a US State Government statement Mrs Clinton had brought up Washington's desire for increasing US investment in West Bengal, including in the retail sector. In New Delhi, Mrs Clinton declared that India should reduce imports of Iranian Oil and comply with western sanctions. At the same time, an Iranian trade delegation in New Delhi, conducted meetings with Indian exporters and trade groups. Indian domestic refineries have already reduced imports of Iranian crude by 15 percent.

CHILD LABOUR

India has more child labourers than any country in the world. There are more than 45 million or higher child labourers in India, between the age of 5 and 14. Aided by shadowy job placement agencies or by kidnapping, many of these children come from India's poorest states. Child labour and trafficking are allied symptoms of poverty. Some poor families, desperate for money, sell their children for work, with a sizeable ending up as prostitutes or manual labourers. A teen maid's life is akin to slavery. Increasing wealth has created a rising demand for domestic workers, with jobs often filled by children. In 2011, more than 32,000 children were reported missing in India. There are limited safe-guards and limited enforcements to

protect such children. Public attitudes are usually permissive. Even families on the lowest rungs of the middle class usually have at least one live-in servant. The Juvenile Justice Act (2000) allows a child between 14 and 18 to work a maximum of six hours a day, in non hazardous work. Below 14 years children are prohibited from working as servants, a statute that is widely flouted. India's wealthy employ a retinue of servants, drivers and other helpers. There are some Indian families living abroad who also take a servant.

NIGERIAN INSURGENTS

A long list of the official targets have been struck of the insurgent violence of northern Nigeria. Police, army officers, elected officials, high ranking civil servants, UN workers, and other perceived supporters of the Nigerian government have been killed. A war against schools is the ominous new front. At night, public and private schools have been doused with gasoline, and set on fire. Thousands of children are stranded at home, without a place to learn. The schools have been fire bombed by the 'Boko Haram' (Book / Western learning forbidden), the Islamist group, waging a war against the Nigerian government, having links with Al Qaeda affiliates in the region. Over the past two years, Maiduguri, the birth place of the Boko Haram insurgency has been under siege, fear and an army-enforced curfew. Since July 2009, Boko Haram has killed nearly 1000 people, spreading from the remote north-east of Nigeria to the north's big cities like Kano and Sokoto. Boko Haram claims to be fighting against corruption, inequality, and injustice, and is against Christian southerners. President Goodluck Jonathan and his advisers are coming round to the need for dialogue. □□□