

COMPETING FOR ENERGY RESOURCES

The recent state visit by Chinese President Hu Jintao to Saudi Arabia has brought the competition for energy resources to the centre stage of global politics. The visit of Chinese President to an oil rich West Asian state, in which several agreements including energy exploration and security were signed, underlines the changing complexion of alliances and partnerships in the international order. The Saudi Prince and a member of the Royal family, Walid bin Talal aptly summed up the visit by saying that Saudi Arabia needed to open new channels beyond West. It is equally important to note that the Chinese President had the privilege of addressing the *Shura* - the highest consultative council of Saudi government that advises the King and his cabinet. The President Hu is reported to have told the council that China was ready to help in bringing stability to the Middle East which was a vital region in the world. It may be pointed out here that the interest in China has been growing in the entire Middle East for the last decade and a half. The opening of Chinese malls and increasing visibility of Chinese business executives in Middle East states provide the indicators of this interest. It may be noted that Saudi-China relations warmed up in the beginning of this year when Saudi King, Abdullah, visited Beijing and signed a memorandum of understanding for wider cooperation and investment in oil, natural gas and minerals.

It is well recognized that the principle of national self interest guides the policies and strategies of states and governments. In the expanding global economic order, the quest for access to new energy resources is equally acquiring faster pace. In this scenario, when US-Saudi-Chinese Oil Companies, Exxon Mobil, Aramco and Sinopec, are exploring gas and oil in southern China, the China's state owned oil company, Sinopec is exploring gas in Saudi Arabia. Thus, the traditional fault-lines of hostile and friendly countries is getting blurred. There is every likelihood that the guarantors of security and stability of regions may change seats.

China has been dealing with Iran and many other states like Africa on the basis of equality and on the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of the states. She has been trying to diffuse the latest tension on Iran's nuclear exploration and has been resisting the initiatives of bringing in a resolution

against Iran in UN Security Council. The rising military and technological power of China is providing Asian states an alternative and a viable power centre to reorganize their foreign and strategic policies. China has the advantage of having demonstrated that it was not interested in the internal political dynamics of other countries.

The new quest for access to energy exploration and resources raises the issue of its impact on global peace and human rights. It is too premature to surmise about the impact of this quest on global peace. However, this pursuit is certainly going to create new strains in the international relations. There is also a likelihood that the issue of 'human rights' would resurge politically in which attempts would be made to pin down the rival states on the issue of human rights deficit. This development does not augur well with the efficacy and expansion of human rights regime.