

Cambodia Teeters on the Brink of Peace

by Larry Jagan

The Cambodian peace process is quickly picking up pace following successful meetings between the four Khmer groups in Thailand and Beijing. In addition, discussions at an Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) meeting made it apparent that a peace settlement based on UN proposals is definitely in the pipeline.

Bangladesh and the World Bank

The five-day visit of the World Bank (WB) Vice President Attila Karaosmanoglu to Bangladesh, the first top level official of the organisation to come here after the new elected government assumed power, will provide an impetus to the ongoing review of the process of structural adjustments undertaken by the government on the advice of the Bank.

The consultation is unlikely to produce any major decision as such, not even on the economic justification for the construction of the Jamuna Bridge, a subject for further study of the Bank. What the consultation should do — we hope, it does — is to strengthen the consensus that the process of reforms, ranging from the enforcement of discipline on financial institutions to liberalisation of imports, has been steadily gaining momentum.

Some divergences of views between the two sides are bound to arise. But they are likely to be more on the pace of reforms than on their substance. In all probability, the concern of the World Bank would be to hasten the process to ensure that it does not get bogged down in bureaucratic lethargy and political drift.

Instead, the on-going review of the reform process should focus on the problems, including many misconceptions, which have cropped up mainly due to inadequate planning on the part of the authorities and lack of prior consultation with trade bodies by concerned ministries.

Not a Fish Market

A most unfortunate incident occurred in the Jatiya Sangsad the other day. An honourable member, perhaps forgetting the time and place in the heat of the moment, pointed his shoes at rival members to announce his displeasure at something or other. We do not question the fact that there may well have been good reason for the member to feel piqued.

Now, there lies the real point: we all want to protect the sanctity of parliament and enhance its prestige in the eyes of the population of this country as well as of the rest of the world. But where does the foremost responsibility lie to ensure that is the case?

For the first time, we have a parliament which is truly representative of the will of the people, and not unnaturally our expectations are high. We have seen four parliaments come, fail in their duties and go. This Sangsad has already proved to be by far a more effective assembly, raising and debating issues relating to our daily lives as well as fundamental ones affecting the overall socio-economic and political development of the country.

But all that could be undone if the members fail to behave in the manner they should inside the House. Differences will surface, even tempers will flare, that is all part and parcel of the process.

FOR the first time since we ousted Pol Pot over 10 years ago, there is a real chance that peace is now about to return to Cambodia," said a senior official in the Hun Sen government.

The international community, it seems, is no longer prepared to see the 12-year-old civil war grind on unnecessarily. More importantly, there has been an intricate web of diplomatic activity around two meetings between Hun Sen's government and the three guerrilla-factions led by Prince Sihanouk.

The first of these was held at Pattaya in Thailand, where no fewer than 14 agreements were initiated. The most important were the implementation of ceasefire, and a proposal to set up the offices of Cambodia's Supreme National Council (SNC) in Phnom Penh, the capital.

The second meeting, in Beijing, was equally significant. It was the first such meeting on Chinese soil, marked by Beijing, as the major backers of the Khmer Rouge, allowing Hun Sen to attend.

Both advances in the peace process are believed by commentators to reflect an improved relationship between China and Vietnam. China, disappointed at the failure of the last Jakarta talks, has actively supported the idea of a ceasefire and has put pressure on their protégés, the Khmer Rouge, to accept it as well.

When Vietnam Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach lost his job at the 7th party congress, he said there had been a lot of negotiation between Chinese and Vietnamese leaders. Observers believe that Thach, renowned for his stridently anti-Chinese position, may have been dismissed as a result of the growing rapport between Beijing and Hanoi.

The EEC is a magnet for most other European countries, western as well as central and eastern countries and for non-European states like Morocco. These countries want to join the 12 member-states to benefit from enhanced trade opportunities due to the single market and to share the decision-making power, to receive the financial assistance provided by the EEC budget to the least developed areas of the Community etc.

In this regard, the crucial question remains the same since the birth of the creation of the "Common Market". There is a tough choice to be made between the deepening of the Community and the widening of it. Since the beginning, the pressure has been very strong and even irrefrangible to open up the Community. From six signatories to the Treaty of Rome in 1957, the member states now number 12 and may be 14 soon with Austria and Sweden

Man of the year Sir, American Biographical Institute has nominated a Bangladeshi (Chief Executive Director of Hotel Agrabad, Chittagong) its Man of The Year 1991. This prestigious decoration has especially illuminated the social service-oriented specialities of courteous Bangladeshi hotel personnel.

was the scene of bloody fighting between them in 1979.

Since it was announced that the SNC would set up in Phnom Penh there has been a rush to recognise diplomatically the legitimacy of the Cambodian interim government.

Australia was the first to appoint an ambassador to the SNC, a task which will be carried out by its envoy to Thailand. The French, Indonesians, Japanese and Canadians have followed suit, and Thailand has said it will reopen its embassy in Phnom Penh once the SNC has opened its offices.

Australian recognition was a natural consequence of Canberra's initiative, with France and Indonesia, in getting the

UN peace plan off the ground, but there is little doubt that all the countries now rushing to court the SNC have economic advantage in mind.

The French and the Japanese are particularly concerned to participate in Cambodia's post-war development. The Japanese and Thais are already heavily involved in stripping the country's forestry reserves. And the French have just announced they are to bid for petroleum exploration rights.

This international interest, despite the continuing war, reflects Cambodia's flourishing business activity, especially in Phnom Penh, and government encouragement of private enterprise. Reflecting this encouragement is the new

Cambodian Commercial Bank set up in a joint venture with a Thai bank. A Thai company recently took over two textile factories in Phnom Penh, bringing to 12 the number of factories in the capital run by private investors. Thirteen more agreements have been signed.

Aid is trickling in much more slowly, and Raoul Jenner, a non-government organisation adviser, warns against a flood of capital that Cambodia could not cope with. "What Cambodia needs most, is larger-scale bilateral aid to help rebuild its devastated infrastructure," he says. The aid trickling in is only a fraction of that which the Khmer refugees, under the Sihanouk-led coalition, re-

ceive. The aid is expected to pick up with the diplomatic breakthrough, and already Japan has said it will provide Cambodia with more than half its needs, but it is waiting for more signs that the civil war is about to end.

The scramble for trade and investment is currently led by Thailand and Singapore, with Japan and France not far behind.

A sign of growing international respectability came with a highly successful visit to France by Cambodia's number two, Chea Sim, president of the National Assembly. Chea has been a tough critic of Hun Sen's more flexible policies, and his participation in international affairs reflects a new united leadership. Chea has since visited Japan and has been invited to South Korea and Taiwan.

Che Sim asked the French to invite Prince Sihanouk, who, as the former monarch of Cambodia, is seen as the key to a negotiated settlement, and his wife Monique to return to live in Paris. It is expected to be granted. This would strengthen French connections with Phnom Penh diplomatically and make access to the coalition leader much easier for Phnom Penh. The Prince currently stays in Beijing, thus restricting access to him, or Pyongyang, which is remote.

Prince Sihanouk is returning to Cambodia for two months in November, ostensibly to bury his late mother-in-law in Cambodian soil in accordance with Khmer custom. He is also about to turn 70, and

is known to want to celebrate a traditional birthday in Phnom Penh.

The Hun Sen government may want Sihanouk in Phnom Penh, but the Khmer Rouge do not. They do not trust the Prince. They never have, and fear that if comfortably settled there, Sihanouk and Hun Sen might carry out a deal isolating the Khmer Rouge.

For its part, the Hun Sen government worries for Sihanouk's safety if the Khmer Rouge decides he is either of no further use to them, or, more ominously, he is an obstacle to its returning to power. Chea Sim told French Foreign Minister Roland Dumas that Sihanouk's safety could be better guaranteed in France than in either Beijing or Pyongyang.

Sihanouk and his wife fear that the Khmer Rouge will kill them if they consider they have betrayed the Khmer cause. This fear has long influenced Sihanouk's position, often causing him to change his mind about dissociating the Khmer Rouge from the coalition. However, the Chinese, mentors of the Khmer Rouge, have so far not made Sihanouk think twice about his plans to return to Phnom Penh.

The Hun Sen government obviously sees the new Chinese role as crucial to solving the decade-long conflict. The head of the Phnom Penh municipal government, Hok Lundt, said he expected the capital's thriving Chinese community to play an important part in efforts to improve Cambodian relations with China.

If this optimism is borne out then an end to the 12-year-old civil war may really be in sight. — GEMINI NEWS

LARRY JAGAN works for the BBC World Service. He was formerly editor of Inside Asia magazine, and then worked for Radio Netherlands.

Cambodia: From war to peace

200km/120miles

1954 Independence from France

1957 Civil war

1975 Khmer Rouge takes over 1-2 m deaths from execution, starvation and disease

1978 Vietnam invades

1978 People's Republic of Kampuchea established

1989 Vietnam completes troop pull-out

1990 UN peace plan proposed and later in year accepted

1991 June: Supreme National Council meets

July: Four Khmer factions meet informally in Beijing

THE FUTURE OF EUROPE — II

Curbing Negative Factors: Role of EEC

by Serge Degallaix

Special to The Star

HOPES, expectations and fears are emerging from the end of a stable world with its own regulatory mechanisms. A new world, less stable and predictable is born. Risks and uncertainty have replaced threat and stability.

The efforts made by European Diplomacy was to curb negative factors, to defuse tensions and to foster all the positive evolutions of a new order.

The EEC is a magnet for most other European countries, western as well as central and eastern countries and for non-European states like Morocco. These countries want to join the 12 member-states to benefit from enhanced trade opportunities due to the single market and to share the decision-making power, to receive the financial assistance provided by the EEC budget to the least developed areas of the Community etc.

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which have applied for membership, and even more in a short period of time with possible membership of other countries belonging to European Free Trade Association (Norway, Finland, Iceland, Switzerland).

Even, if after a transitory period, new members have to comply with existing rules of the EEC, the risk is inescapable: a great number of unprepared members can weaken the Community and prevent her from becoming a strong pole of stability in Europe.

At the Summit of Rome, in December 1990, it was decided that two new treaties would be negotiated for entering into force by January 1, 1993.

One is the treaty for Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) which will decide over the timing and methods for the creation of a single currency managed by Euro Fed, playing the role of a central bank and allowed by

breakthrough for foreign policy with a two-tier system: unanimity should be required at the level of heads of state and government for the fundamental choices while the Council of Ministers would be in charge of implementing the decisions taken at the Summit level according to the rule of qualified majority.

convergence of economic policies. The second treaty deals with the Political Union and some precise topics as foreign policy, European defence, powers of European Parliament etc.

France is advocating somelovakia. They will offer a free trade zone in two phases of five years each, a substantial financial assistance and other facilities. With the Soviet Union, a cooperation agreement was signed in 1989, and the Rome Summit in 1990, proposed a broader agreement to be discussed.

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The EEC constitutes a first level of organisation for Europe, strengthening herself but in a dynamic relation with the rest of Europe and the Third World.

With other countries like Turkey, Malta or Cyprus, Association's agreements have been signed, while for the rest of the developing world, protocols of assistance have been concluded and special facilities granted to LDCs by the member States.

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Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

long. Strange it is in some cases that even the owner occupied houses had been declared abandoned by the then governments. The present government of our cherished democratic desire were believe would be kind enough to end the hardships of those homeowners and citizens who are passing their days with their families in most of complications for the last 20 years. Though very late, but justice they deserve.

An Affected citizen

Elvis Presley Sir, I am an Elvis Presley fan and I was very glad to learn about the proposed Elvis Presley fan club of Bangladesh from the letter section of your paper (July 30). I would very much like to contact Mr. Adeb Reza (the winter of the letter), but his full address was not published along with his letter. I would be very grateful to get his full address or telephone number so that I can contact him.

Acute African Angles

by Farooq Mehdi

RECENT events in Africa have been the harbinger of both positive and negative change. Positive, in that the last remnants of colonialism and racialism are finally beginning to crumble. A peace treaty has been signed in Angola and, slowly but surely, dictatorial regimes are becoming a thing of the past.

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