

# Time to Change the Seats at the United Nations

by Daya Kishan Thussu

## Democracy in Thailand

For the Thai army, it may be a case of winning a battle but losing a war. After months of intensive debate, popular demonstrations and pro-democracy writing in the media, Thailand's National Assembly has approved a constitution that gives the country's military a strong say in the running of the government. Since the cross section of people who were once so vocal against the draft constitution — at one stage, some 50,000 people gathered at a rally — appear to have accepted the approval by the Assembly without much of a protest, the army may well have won the battle.

However, the fact remains that the simmering discontent in Thailand against the army's manipulative role against democracy is unlikely to subside. Instead of winning the trust of the people, the army may well have raised the level of unspoken hostility with the people, thus losing the war.

The most controversial provision in the constitution relates to the composition and the role of the 270-member Senate. All appointed by the military junta, these senators can vote on a confidence motion, together with 360 elected members of the lower house. This means that if all senators vote as one and gain the support of no more than 46 elected MPs, they can bring down a government. As pro-democracy forces in Bangkok say, this provision placing the Senate in the position of a custodian of the elected government makes a mockery of democracy.

One reason why a cross section of people have made no strong protest, but vowed to fight against the constitution in the general election, now due to be held in March, is because the junta has agreed to remove a number of other blatantly undemocratic provisions which were incorporated in the earlier draft. One such provision gave the Senate the power to approve or disapprove the national budget. In this sense, the junta may well have developed a compromising mood. Some analysts now assume that the army has hinted that the Senate would not play a direct role in bringing down an elected government. However, few Thais would take such a hint which is anything but a firm commitment at its face value.

Whatever opposition forces may now say about changing the constitution after the March election — it is hardly clear how this will be done — the fact remains that the responsibility for putting the country firmly on the road to democracy lies with political parties. As long as these parties indulge in in-fighting, horse trading, rampant corruption and operate without well-defined programmes, the army will always have the excuse — or a valid reason, as some say — for stepping in, as the junta would claim, to clear the mess. Many of the coups staged by the army since the abolition of the absolute monarchy in 1937 were based on this rationale. This does not mean that a revitalisation of the political process, a process that provides the new generation of Thais a place in the mainstream, would be ungrudgingly accepted by the army. However, this is the only way out for a country which is yet to show that its undoubted economic progress and its elusive democracy should go together.

## Of Dacoities and Piracies

There were recently a number of confusing reports in the press about the possible culprits of the frequent cases of piracy in the Bay of Bengal. There wasn't any confusion, however, about the fact of the horrific incidents most of which featured killing by throwing overboard poor fishermen from trawlers and fishing boats. The frequency of such piracy could very well suggest that organised efforts are behind these with the aim of terrorising Bangladeshi marine fishing enterprises of the Bay. But that is a case to be established and resisted with full state-power. Before that is done, one can be certain that Bangladesh's own sea is far from secure for the Bangladeshis themselves and that the Bangladesh Government is failing to make the Bay a fair ground abiding by sea laws, not to speak of making it into the proverbial lake of the Bengalees which it indeed is in so many physical and historical senses.

In a land not unfamiliar with river piracy and its gruesome concomitants, the sea piracy reports apparently have failed to move hearts and evoke state response serious enough to inhibit the incidence of such piracies. Waterways are far from secured against persons bent on making a quick taka. It is indeed a very formidable task to make seas and rivers safe for lawful using, specially for nations with unenviable coffers of money. And it cannot be said that the government is doing all of whatever little it can do in the matter of making the sea and our rivers safe from human depredations.

That is a suspicion that creeps inexorably into the mind when one looks at the robbery-related situation of the roads. It should be supremely within the means of the government to make the roads safe against dacoity. And yet, as one national daily reports, there has been as many as 48 dacoities on moving trucks and buses in the last three months. This is totally unacceptable for anyone thinking he is living in a civilised society.

Why can't there be in a developing society specially harsh punishments for crimes that tell upon not so much on the person of a man or woman but on the economy by which the whole society thrives? Highway robbery, exactly as river and sea piracy are long being held as the highest forms of crime in the now so-called developed world. This can be the starting point for a whole series of serious and integrated measures targeted to contain and eliminate dacoities and piracies on moving vehicles and vessels—the life-line of the nation's economy.

Let us hope our counsel works.

**G**IVEN the high profile of the United Nations earlier this year during the Gulf crisis, it seems strange that its lack of involvement in the Madrid Middle East peace conference was barely noticed. After all, the conference was based on UN Resolutions 242 and 338 and concerned with finding answers to the biggest challenge to international diplomacy: the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The United States acquiesced in Israel's insistence that the UN should have only observer status, while at almost the same time, the UN played a significant part in reaching a settlement on Cambodia.

After the Cold War many Third World countries sense the emergence of an expanded Northern bloc in the UN, dominated by the US. They fear that this could be detrimental to the interests of the developing countries if they do not toe the US line.

During the Cold War the eastern bloc countries stood by the Non-aligned countries on all major issues. Now, with the end of Communism in the Soviet Union, many in the developing world feel that, as the only remaining superpower, the US will use the UN to promote its own version of a new world order.

The extent of US domination of the UN system was seen in September when the head of the team inspecting Iraq's nuclear capability, David Kay, faxed his team's findings not to the International Atomic Energy Agency's headquarters in Vienna, nor to the UN in New York, but to the US State Department in Washington.

The Gulf crisis brought the role of the UN in solving world

*The suggestion for a peace force in Yugoslavia again puts the spotlight on the United Nations. In the Gulf crisis the UN was seen as finally coming of age. But many in the developing countries fear that the US, which dominates the Security Council, seeks to hijack the UN to promote its own version of a new world order. The Security Council structure needs reexamining if the UN is to function more democratically.*

problems into international focus. Diplomats, especially in the West, congratulated themselves on the level of international solidarity against Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Some in the

Third World were alarmed by the power of the US to set the international agenda.

UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar himself called the war a US rather than a UN action. If it had been a genuine UN operation, the other 130 UN members outside the "coalition forces," should have contributed, however modestly, to the war effort.

Despite the prominent UN role before the war began, the Security Council did not meet in the first four weeks of the coalition bombing of Iraq — among the most intensive in history — because of US insistence. And why was the UN General Assembly not convened? Could it have been because the Non-aligned countries have a majority there?

Critics of US foreign policy charge that Washington has a bleak record as far as the UN is concerned. In its 45-year existence the UN has been used more often than not as a tool for Western — read US — foreign policy goals.

UN ineffectiveness over the years cannot be blamed entirely on Cold War divisions. An overwhelming majority of the UN Security Council resolutions were vetoed by the US and Britain. Most had little or nothing to do with the Cold War, but were supporting anti-colonial struggles in the Third World.

In addition, American intransigence towards ILO, UNESCO, International Court of Justice and WHO has helped undermine the UN system.

Together with its client states, the US has consistently used the UN to justify military interference in Vietnam, Grenada, Libya, Panama and covert subversion in Iran, Lebanon, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Angola and Mozambique.

With the UN under the spotlight, many analysts are beginning to question permanent memberships on the UN Security Council, a framework which dates from the allied victory in World War Two.

The five permanent members of the UN Security Council, namely the US, Britain, France, the Soviet Union (now Union of Sovereign States) and China have the power of veto.

Until 1971, one-fifth of the world's population living in Communist China was not even represented in the UN, while so-called nationalist China (Taiwan) was a permanent member of the Security Council.

Nearly 50 years later, with the unification of Germany and end of the Cold War, the post-war era has finally ended. Why should the entire continents of Africa and Latin America be excluded from being permanently represented?

What about Japan (world's

biggest creditor nation), and Germany (Europe's biggest economic power)? The dubious qualification of a nuclear capability is no longer valid; India exploded a nuclear device back in 1974.

The other question is whether Britain and France should continue to be permanent members. While claiming independence from US foreign policy, France's voting pattern in the Security Council has generally been pro-US.

Moreover, France has done its best to prop up dictatorships in Francophone Africa. The most recent example was dispatching French troops to the dictator Mobutu's Zaire. No one has called for an emergency session of the UN Security Council to discuss French intervention in Zaire.

Britain's foreign policy has shown even less autonomy from its transatlantic ally. In the past decades, especially since the Suez debacle, British policy has seemed little more than playing second fiddle to the US (the only obvious difference is the British effort to sustain the apartheid regime in South Africa).

In the light of these facts it would seem sensible to have a rotating European Commission (EC) permanent membership along with permanent Third World representation in the Security Council where crucial decisions are made.

No democratic new world order can be achieved until the UN addresses Third World demands for a more just and humane international order.

— GEMINI NEWS

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## The UN Security Council

● Council has 15 members—5 permanent. Functions continuously. Decisions binding on all UN members.



● Presidency changes monthly, rotates in alphabetical order

● 10 elected members serve for two-year terms

● Decisions on important questions need 9 Yes votes, but any permanent member can veto decision. Procedural matters also need 9 Yes votes. 2536 M

**H**ONOLULU, Hawaii — Nuclear weapons are being phased out by the Bush proposal. There are some reasons to celebrate. These are dreadful weapons. But they are also, militarily speaking, unsuitable weapons and that — rather than their morally dubious quality — is probably the major reason why they are being phased out.

Nuclear weapons are dangerous to the sender, not only to the receiver, because of secondary radioactivity carried through air and water currents and ultimately through the food chain, to say nothing of the effects of possible nuclear winter.

In the military sense, they destroy too much to be politically useful. And the method of delivery — missiles launched from land, sea, or air — is far too slow: 10-30 minutes for regional and global "theaters" — giving the other side time to retaliate.

A gun that destroys the whole house and its valuables when the goal is to kill only the owner — and only after giving him sufficient time to shoot back — is not a good gun.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the nuclear powers want to rid themselves of this major intellectual and political mistake.

What will come in the place of nuclear weapons? There are at least two ways of answering

## Disarmament: New Arms, New Wars

*The phase-out of nuclear arms clears space for even more devastating weapons, asserts Norwegian disarmament expert Johan Galtung, who enumerates the varied possibilities that arms manufacturers may explore in coming years and in what situations these weapons might be used.*

that question — looking at the speculation of arms in the making, or asking what kind of future wars are likely.

If we proceed in the armaments alphabet beyond A (atomic, meaning nuclear), B (biological) and C (chemical weapons), we come to D (directed energy weapons, also known as third generation nuclear), E (environmental), F (fuel air explosives), G (genetic manipulation), L (laser beams and pulses), M (micro waves), P (particle beams and pulses), R (radiological), S (solar power systems) — just to mention a few.

To stop this kind of development, very strong peace movements and/or peace policies would be needed, and they are not visible right now — probably because these weapons, unlike the nuclear weapons being phased out, are not seen as a clear and immediate danger. The research and development of these and other weapon systems will probably go on as a result of

their own inertia and through a lack of public interest.

These are macro-war weapons capable of incapacitating millions, typically meant for wars between superpowers (except that fuel air explosives can also be used in conflicts like the Gulf War). People may feel there is no danger, as there is only one superpower right now, the United States.

But they are forgetting the way Japan and the European Community are shaping up as global powers and the way Russia, China and India are aspiring to the status of regional powers.

Then there are the meso-wars, the middle-range wars between more ordinary countries, like the Iran-Iraq war, in which weapons like tanks and planes are still used. Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union notwithstanding, these wars are not also being phased out.

Major conflicts are occurring within countries, with the

military used for coups and counter-coups. With modern weapons, such wars cost too much in life, property, time, money and, of course, weapons. Quick wars are demanded wars without protest movements.

Then we come to the micro-wars. The warriors are often terrorists and torturers, as we have seen in so many Third World countries in what is called "low intensity conflict". The weapons are primitive but can easily become more sophisticated, like those used in some Red Army Faction (RAF) killings in

Germany, and in the torture techniques in which physicians play a major role.

But most important is the macro-micro combination hitting the rebellious country or the country supposedly supporting or hiding terrorism from above, with precision guided weapons of any kind, from the DFLP and S varieties mentioned above, to the "smart" bombs of Gulf War fame.

There is no need for the arms to be nuclear. In fact that would be counter-productive, which explains why Washington is willing to forgo

nuclear weapons while at the same time ordering more than 8,000 cruise missiles.

Whether the intelligence is good enough to establish valid targets is another matter. The Gulf War still looks like an effort to cure a toothache by means of a sledge-hammer, maiming the patient while leaving the rotten tooth in place. A military failure, in other words.

From an arms merchant's point of view these are the weapons of the future. Rockets are now being sold at the arms bazaars in Miami. With at least 130 nations struggling for sovereignty in the second wave of decolonisation — the first wave was against Western colonialism — there will be more willing buyers for these weapons than willing sellers.

The conclusion: there is no alternative to creative conflict resolution as long as disarmament only clears space for even worse arms, and arms embargoes only stimulate local production. — IPS

## To the Editor...

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.

### Economy

Sir, This refers to the letter of L. Lestourgeon under the caption 'Daughters of Darkness' and the opinion of Hubert Frances Sarker under the caption 'Exodus, Influx, Misery' published on Nov. 29 issue of The Daily Star. It is a co-incidence that both the letters dealt with a common subject, i.e. country's economic situation in one way or the other.

During his tenure of office the Acting President, Justice Shahabuddin Ahmed, constituted 29 task forces to make enquiry and submit their report on different aspects of national problems. One of such committees was constituted to find out the bottlenecks in the way of self-reliance of our economy. Mr. Shafuddin Sarker, President, Institute of Diploma Engineers (IDE) was one of the members of that committee. He tried to find out the bottlenecks in his own way and compiled his findings in a separate report. The report was not incorporated in the final report submitted to the Acting President.

In his report Mr. Sarker tried to show some of the wastages in the process of establishing heavy industry in the country. He cited a few cases of extravagancy and wastages. According to him Zia Fertilizer Factory's initial cost was Taka 69 crore but it was completed at the cost of Taka 1050 crore. So is the case of Chittagong Urea Fertilizer Factory estimated cost of which

was 630 crores but on completion the expenditure stood at Taka 1650 crore.

Mr. Sarker discarded the conventional theory of tackling the unemployment problem by setting up heavy industries in the country. He cited two examples: (1) Tongi Sword Blade Factory, established at a cost of Taka 24 crores, employed only 126 persons. Cost of per head employment came to Taka 19,04,764/- (2) Chittagong Urea Fertilizer Factory, established at a cost of Taka 1650, employed only 1150 persons. Per head employment cost came to Taka 1.5 crore. Then he posed a question: if per head employment cost ranges from 20 lacs to 1.5 crore then how much money do we need to create employment opportunity for 1.75 crore unemployed persons and whether such capital intensive industry are economically feasible and viable for a poor country like Bangladesh?

Mr. Sarker suggested for establishing cottage industry or labour intensive industry in the villages in place of capital intensive industry so that the cost of employment per head may come down to Taka 10,000/- or thereabout.

Next he put emphasis on completion of our projects at the original estimated cost. He posed a question to our planners: why in spite of the fact that we have received aid in terms of cash and kind three times bigger than that of West Germany (which also, after the Second World War,

received aid and loans for its economic rehabilitation), still we are the poorest of all the nations? He then answered: we have not properly utilized the aid, grants and loan. We have not competed our projects with the loan, grants and aid given for the purposes.

Mr. Sarker put emphasis upon education and came to the conclusion that only education could help this nation to survive and eliminate poverty. He suggested that, we must educate our future generation in our mother tongue keeping English as an associated language. To check wastage and dropouts at different levels he further suggested for one channel education system.

I think the report prepared by Mr. Sarker would be given due consideration by the authority concerned to derive a real picture of our country.

M. Saleem Ullah, Advocate, Motiheel C/A, Dhaka

### State of affairs

Sir, The present state of democracy is rather disappointing. The political parties are themselves violating the universal codes of democracy. In my opinion, there is only one way to overcome the present undesired situation, that is, we must learn to speak, accept, and implement truth, absolute truth. Our esteemed political leaders should boldly undertake a crash programme to educate their party workers to speak truth and to act truthfully.

Unfortunately, in my observation, we are rapidly losing our originality and moving towards self-destruction.

M. Zahidul Haque, Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agril. College, Dhaka.

## OPINION

### Of Patients and Hospitals

This is not exactly all about my wife aged 48, suffering from chronic renal failure and fighting for her life in PG Hospital.

She lost a kidney in 1977 in an operation while removing stones formed in it. She had however been pulling on well with only one kidney for fifteen years. But then she developed hypertension and due to its severity she suffered stroke twice, paralyzing her right limbs and causing facial paralysis with the loss of voice. Now, in the month of June 1991 she again fell very seriously sick with kidney problems and month later, was removed from Chittagong Medical College Hospital to PG Hospital, this highest seat of research and largest centre for health care in the country.

Thank God, the patient was paid fullest attention by the learned physicians. The situation was brought under their control. They conducted IPD four times to bring her in line with Haemo Dialysis system which is the only method to keep a patient of chronic renal failure alive.

But sadly, during this process after fistula operation, the patients had to pay a very high premium due to what I feel compelled to say — sheer negligence of doctors and nurses on duty. Let me skip it over as it reminds us of the saddest hazard. I shall only hope that it would not happen to any one else in any hospital.

Kidney wards (both male and female) are the living samples of hell-full of insects, cockroaches and filth everywhere. Toilets, attached to, always remain unclean and stinky. So is the behaviour of sweepers and 'ayas'. Doctors hardly care for hygiene and environment; they simply enter into the ward, shout at patients and their attendants, if any around; whereas unclean toilets, according to Prof Haroonur Raahid, are main causes of urinary infections and kidney problems.

Visitors, without any restriction, are allowed to sit and gossip in the female wards till late night thus causing obvious sufferings to the patients re-

quiring rest, relaxation and sleep. Security as well as administration seem to be nobody's function at the hospital.

We all know that AIDS and cancer patients are sure to die to-day, tomorrow or a day after. So is a kidney patient. As Professor Motur Rahman said, "There is no treatment to renal failure. Transplantation too is not a guarantee for cure; dialysis is no remedy, it only aims at keeping a patient alive for the time being."

Despite above facts, kidney patients, and for that matter any patient fighting for life, counting days helplessly lying on hospital beds, are inhumanly treated and roughly handled by doctors, nurses and even sweepers, who are paid by the poor tax-payers. With the exception of a microscopic few doctors and nurses, many of them seemingly are not aware of their solemn pledge and commitment to the profession and the nation. As a keen observer and regular visitor to the wards, I can not forget strange behaviour of some doctors and specially of some nurses who are, I regret to say, open disgrace to this noble profession.

What surprises me most is that similar treatment is meted out to patients' attendants and guardians—may be a husband, parents or children of the patient. I visited many countries in the world and never came across such a strange inhuman treatment anywhere either to the patients or to their attendants/visitors.

This country is no more under a colonial rule, neither it is governed by an autocratic regime. Bangladesh is now purely a democratic country with a democratically elected government in power. It is therefore expected that all actions of the public servants must aim at welfare of and rendering good to the people. So I avail myself of an opportunity to request the hon'ble Health Minister to regenerate his Ministry, reorganise it in the light of democratic practice and ask the officials to regularly visit hospitals for a

routine check inside and outside and also replenish constant supplies of medicines and other essential items. It may be pertinently mentioned here that a patient has to buy everything, all medicines and necessary items right from cotton to dialysing sets etc.

Now, to my utter astonishment I have heard a funny story about an indent placed to WHO for the import of water treatment plant for Haemodialysis centre at the PG Hospital. The plant is shipped alright and consignment received, of course, without the water tank. So the entire purpose is defeated and the plant could not be commissioned. Patients requiring dialysis twice a week are found shuttling from PG to CMH and CMH to a commercially operated clinic. Who is responsible for this and what punishment should be prescribed for this offence?

Finally, oh, my beloved Chittagong — the port city, which gives birth to thousands of wealthy sons every minute — she has a Medical College Hospital which lacks in modern and essential facilities including Haemo-Dialysis. No patient can afford going to Dhaka twice a week for dialysis, what to speak of Calcutta, Bangkok or Valore. This is being practically possible nor economically feasible.

Let me disclose an interesting information: there are two Haemo-Dialysis machines lying idle at CMH for reasons best known to the hospital authorities. It will be highly appreciated if they kindly explain reasons behind keeping these two machines idle through press for the information of the suffering public. Simultaneously my heart goes out in an instant search of those lucky sons of our soil who possess enormous wealth by the grace of God. Can't they do a favour to the suffering humanity by organising kidney deptt in Chittagong Medical College Hospital, or at least by putting those two Haemo-Dialysis machines on commission?

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