

Mixed Signals from India

Notwithstanding a consensus among all countries in South Asia that they should all move ahead in fulfilling their shared commitment to SAARC, especially in holding the twice-postponed Summit, New Delhi has been sending out mixed signals about its position. These signals have undoubtedly created a credibility gap between what India wants and what it would like others, especially Bangladesh, to believe. Again, there is also a feeling in some quarters that the Government of PV Narasimha Rao is unable to make up its mind. If the latter explanation has any validity, the seven-nation regional alliance has become a victim of New Delhi's indecision.

The latest mixed signals have come from two different places. According to a joint press release issued in Colombo after a special envoy of India, Eduardo Faleiro, had talked to President Ranasinghe Premadasa, both Sri Lanka and India have agreed to finalise fresh dates for the SAARC summit "as soon as possible." We are pleased with a note of urgency contained in the press statement which also underscored the need for maintaining the momentum of the activities of the alliance.

While this press release from Colombo offered a positive note, the press here yesterday reported a statement by a senior Indian official that new dates for the summit could be fixed only after the "region returned to normalcy." Significantly enough, the Indian official said that this was precisely what Prime Minister Rao had said in his letter to Prime Minister Begum Zia which was brought here by the Minister of State for External Affairs RL Bhatia. This reference to the "normalcy in the region" not only suffers from ambiguity but also shifts the focus from what we regard as a troubled situation in India which prevented Rao from leaving his country for the Jan 13-14 summit to what is a near-normal situation in Bangladesh which plays host to the summit. While we agree that some sections of people in this country remain highly critical of New Delhi's handling of the Ayodhya crisis or, for that matter, of the communal situation in parts of India, especially in Bombay and Ahmedabad, we have been largely able to contain the situation inside Bangladesh. The so-called Long March to Ayodhya is very much a thing of the past.

What further added to the confusion was that while Bhatia was meeting Prime Minister Begum Zia and Bangladesh officials, sources close to the Indian High Commission here were speaking to the press or even issuing statements taking a far more aggressive position than one adopted by Bhatia on his arrival in Dhaka about "a vitiated atmosphere marked by recriminations and counter-recriminations in the region."

There is full understanding in Bangladesh about the crisis faced by New Delhi. All that we want is that the situation inside India be brought under control not only for the sake of holding the SAARC Summit but also for saving innocent lives. In order to prevent any deterioration of the situation on Indo-Bangladesh border, Bangladesh security forces fired at the Long March in Jessore and killed five protesters. Now, for New Delhi to pass on the blame for the situation to the "region" and suggest that the summit would be held only when "normalcy" returns to the whole area, meaning India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, is unfair, unhelpful and, as some may say, a little devious.

Nothing Like a Cup of Tea

There was a time when the Indian Tea Market Expansion Board of the undivided subcontinent would spare no effort to make the populace pick up one more compelling habit. Their field workers would distribute free packets of tea leaves, visit houses to teach how to brew a cup of good black or English tea and also buy back the empty used packets.

The exertions paid off capitably. Not only the subcontinent, the entire globe picked up a new addiction—non-narcotic and one that did not originate in pre-Columbian America. But it was no easy thing. The Bengalees—as first hand knowledge says—resisted as if there were some Enfield gun cartouche there to derail people from their age-old ways and beliefs. Prafulla Chandra Roy, the brilliant chemist turned a savant, convinced the Bengalees that tea was positively a poisonous drink and would however not part with his cup of the same brew. Bengalees have since been very ambivalent about this miracle herbal product the best of which is grown in their own land. It is still difficult to find all in a family enjoying tea. And the main plea for not falling for the thing was mostly concern for health.

Russians, great tea drinkers as they have been, whether in the form of kvass or green tea—strangely call Kawn throughout the Pakhtoon land—did much to convince that this wonder gift from China to civilisation was the next best thing to ginseng—the other Chinese wonder drug. While ginseng's virtues were more of a legend, tea was scientifically analysed to prove beneficial to the human body in many respects. It does not boost blood pressure as does coffee but nevertheless cleanses up capillary-end reaching to the skin surface making possible a true but short-lived rejuvenation of the body. But they said, in order to get the feel, one must sip at least about 20 cups of a light brew sans sugar sans milk and with only short breaks between.

Tea, it was always thought, by all people, that much of the good or bad of tea depended on how it was prepared. The same Tea Market Expansion Board used to buy valuable newspaper space to print a manual for how to make a good cup of English tea—in an English rivalling in its simple majesty that King James's edition of the Bible. It took half a century to make the manual less than a gospel. Health faddists on an ever-increasing number were opting for a milkless and sugarless light brew—and a lot of it at a time.

On Monday a four-day international symposium started in Calcutta to discuss "can tea cure cholera or diarrhoea or improve neuro-muscular functions" and "does it have anti-carcinogenic functions while also preventing cardio-vascular diseases". Whatever the outcome of the discussion, it is certain that believers in tea's being a panacea will remain. And one is almost sure that the Calcutta meet would only indicate their faith in tea.

There is already a strong Japanese stand, solidly supported by empirical and statistical proofs, "that five cups of green tea a day, keeps cancer away". How we hope this is true.

DESPITE growing recognition by Asian states of the validity of human rights as an international issue, governments in the region did little in 1992 to correct abuses that have afflicted Asia in recent years.

The New York-based group, Human Rights Watch, an umbrella group for five regional bodies, including Asia Watch, says in its annual report that Asian governments sowed increasing sensitivity to charges of abuse, especially by establishing official human rights bodies throughout the continent.

But these moves "appeared to be more an effort to fend off international criticism than a genuine attempt to ameliorate abuses."

It reported that independent rights monitors in Asia had a "difficult year", with governments using a variety of tactics—from murder to cutting off outside funding—to intimidate them.

Independent monitors found themselves especially at risk in areas of ongoing civil strife within countries, like India, which have generally permitted a high degree of freedom of expression and association.

A few days before they released the report in early December, a human rights monitor was murdered in the conflict-ravaged Indian state of Kashmir.

Human rights problems in 1992 remained much the same as last year—mistreatment of Chinese political prisoners, atrocities committed by Burmese military authorities against national minorities, and abuses by Indian and Indonesian government forces against independence forces in Kashmir and East Timor continued.

In addition, the collapse of the Najibullah government in Afghanistan "threw that country into a state of chaos and factional fighting that threatened to turn the country into an Asian Somalia," according to the report.

In Cambodia, the refusal of the Khmer Rouge to cooperate with UN forces there raised the spectre of a return to influence of one of the region's "deadliest" organisations, it said.

If there was one bright spot in Asia, according to the report, it was Taiwan's "continued progress toward a more open society."

As for efforts to defend against largely Western

HUMAN RIGHTS

Asia Gets Bad 1992 Report Card

Aside from devising ways to fend off Western criticism of its human rights record, Asian governments did little to stem abuses in 1992. Jim Lobe of IPS reports from Washington.

charges of rights abuse, the governments of India, Indonesia, China, Cambodia, Sri Lanka and India all took steps in the past two years to set up official human rights bodies or to issue reports affirming their own rights performance.

And the governments of the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) began discussing the creation of a governmental Human Rights Forum for South-east Asia.

But at the same time, governments across South and South-east Asia launched efforts to develop a common position to be presented at the UN World Conference on Human Rights scheduled to be held in Vienna next June.

The underlying message of Asian governments was that while discussion of human rights issues was legitimate, control over the interpretation and implementation of international human rights standards should rest with the government in question," said the report.

And, despite their efforts to address human rights in international fora, Asian governments during 1992 showed a "striking" tendency to take advantage of rights abuses in neighbouring countries.

Thus, the military government in Burma was armed by China and "kept afloat" by trade with China and Thailand. At the same time, Bangkok has refused to seal off its borders to the gem and logging trade that sustains the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia.

Pakistan's support for Kashmiri militants has contributed to an escalation of the conflict, while Saudi Arabia and Pakistan apparently continue to support Afghan Mujahideen leader Gulbuddin Hekmatyar whose forces perpetrated serious rights abuses during the civil war there, according to the report.

As elsewhere, the administration of US President George Bush did not place a high priority on human rights problems in the region, according to Human Rights Watch, which noted that Asian governments are awaiting next month's inauguration of President-elect Bill Clinton "with some anxiety".



The group charged that, with the exception of Burma, Bush had largely "encouraged"

Preventive Detentions in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

by Nizamul Huq Nasim and Adilur Rahman Khan

AN extraordinary situation prevails in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Systematic violations of human rights are taking place and information regarding such violations is rarely made available to the rest of the nation.

Such human rights violations frequently take the form of illegal detentions. As in the rest of Bangladesh, preventive detentions under the Special Powers Act, 1974 are all too often effected on the basis of vague and unsubstantiated grounds. Countless persons are imprisoned in Khagrachhari, Rangamati, Bandarban and Chittagong jails purely on suspicion. Three orders of detention contain vague allegations to the effect that they are "dangerous persons" or authorities are unable to point out specifically WHY these persons are dangerous or WHICH of their activities are dangerous or anti-state or HOW OR WHEN they assisted the Shanti Bahini. Consequently when these orders have been challenged, the High Court Division has declared the orders of detention to be illegal and without lawful authority and has directed their immediate release. Such orders have been issued in at least 70 cases since January 1992.

It is disturbing to note that many detenus in the Chittagong Hill Tracts have been denied their constitutional right to legal relief against illegal detentions.

Firstly, it appears that in many cases, the authorities fail to observe their legal obligation to produce detenus before a court or magistrate within 24 hours. Secondly, it is alleged that such persons are denied access not only to their legal representatives but to their relatives and friends. The denial of access also means relatives etc are unable to obtain copies of the original order of detention served upon the person concerned, documentation which is essential to initiate legal proceedings /a writ petition.

Reports also indicate that persons seeking legal relief have been threatened, particularly following the recent spate of release orders granted by the High Court division in writ petitions challenging such detentions as illegal.

Further peculiar characteristics distinguish illegal detentions in the Chittagong Hill Tracts from those in the rest of the country. In most cases, even when a period of detention has extended over six months, it is found that the authorities do not place the matter before the Advisory Board for review as they are constitutionally bound to do, although in some cases, the detenus were detained for about three years e.g. Palash Chakma was detained from 2.6.1989 after being arrested in connection with Kotwali PS General Dairy entry No 100

dated 3.5.1989. Some vague grounds were served upon him on 8.6.1989 and he was not produced before the Advisory Board ultimately his detention was declared to have been without any lawful authority vide judgement by an order dated 16.2.1992 by the High Court division and after that he was released.

A gross disregard for the authority of the High Court division appears to prevail. Even after the passing of an order of the High Court division, many detenus have not been released. Instead, members of the security forces have, on the orders of local officers, taken them into custody of law enforcing agencies from the moment of their release at the jail gate; this is a clear contempt of court.

Consequently, such detenus are either freed after a further spell of detention or returned to imprisonment under a new detention order. For example, Shukhna Chakma was taken by law enforcing agencies from jail after his release as ordered by the High Court division in March 1992 and was detained in their custody. After his lawyers met with the law enforcing agencies, he, along with some other detenus was released from custody in April 1992.

Detention in the Chittagong Hill Tracts displays another special feature. The military authorities effect detentions in

trade and investment" with Asian nations "at the expense of human rights".

In country after country, whether China, Indonesia, India or Sri Lanka (the administration) put business first and assumed that as long as economic reforms in favour of foreign investment were underway, political change was inevitable, and concerted pressure on human rights neither desirable nor necessary.

The report noted that Bush vetoed conditions on preferential trade status for China, lobbied against a cut-off in military aid to Indonesia after last year's massacre in East Timor, and was "too quick to resume military cooperation with Thailand after its military forces massacred civilians in Bangkok last May."

the absence of orders issued by the district magistrate or the government.

Recently, following queries raised by lawyers and other activist groups, there appears to have been some improvement in this matter and military authorities have indicated that such detentions in the absence of prior orders are prohibited. The change in attitude is commendable.

It is important to note that many people are now in jail custody facing criminal charges such as waging war or attempting to wage war or abating waging war against Bangladesh (section 121 of the Penal Code of Bangladesh), conspiracy to commit the above offences (section 121 A PC) collection of arms with the intention of waging war (section 122 PC), sedition (section 124 A PC) and charges under the Arms Acts etc and also under section 54 of the court of criminal procedure. For example, one Chakkua Chakma was detained under Special Powers Act and also charged under section 121 A and he has been convicted in the criminal case against which appeal is pending before the High Court division. These cases, however, do not fall within the scope of preventive detention under the Special Powers Act 1974 and have not, therefore, been discussed in detail here.

The writers are advocates, Bangladesh High Court.

ALTHOUGH the Japan Atomic Energy Commission and the Science and Technology Agency have kept much of the information on plutonium secret, the Citizens' Nuclear Information Centre in Tokyo has made detailed analytical studies of data available and has concluded that over the long term Japan will have an enormous surplus of plutonium.

A recent detailed study of the Washington-based Nuclear Control Institute has also come to the same conclusion.

It is estimated that Japan's domestic production of plutonium from its two reprocessing plants at Tokai and Rokkasho alone will be sufficient to satisfy the plutonium needs of its reactors at Joyo, Fugen and Monju.

Many European countries are reviewing the notion of plutonium recycling, because all three technologies which require plutonium—fast breeder reactors, advanced thermal reactors and mixed oxide fuel (MOX)—present special problems.

The current state of nuclear technology and research indicate that fast breeder reactors are unlikely to become commercially viable for another five decades or so.

The industry is even more sceptical about advanced thermal reactors, leaving MOX as the only feasible, immediate use for recycled plutonium.

The Threat of Plutonium Proliferation-II Reprocessing, Stockpiling should be Stopped

by RS McCoy

However, the high cost of reprocessing and the low cost of uranium make MOX much more expensive than using uranium as fuel and disposing of the spent fuel without reprocessing (that is, the once-through cycle). Even France, a firm promoter of plutonium recycling in the past, has concluded that MOX will increase overall costs considerably.

All this suggests that Japan has nothing to gain from pursuing the plutonium fuel cycle, particularly in the face of trends in other countries, gave worldwide concern over the ecological dangers of plutonium shipments, and the perceived anxieties of the international community over nuclear weapons proliferation.

Japan is now the largest customer of the large-scale reprocessing plants in Sellafield and La Hague. If Japan renounced reprocessing, it would almost certainly lead to a global suspension of a very dangerous technology, with multiple security and environmental ramifications.

Nuclear Proliferation

The Deputy Director of the IAEA, William Dircks, speaking in Japan in April 1992, said, "From a security point of view, isolated plutonium is best kept

in reactors—in the reactor fuel. Agreeing that the supply of plutonium will far exceed the industrial capacity to absorb plutonium into peaceful, commercial nuclear industrial activities," Dircks went on to say that "the excess of isolated fissile plutonium from civilian nuclear programmes poses a major political and security problem worldwide".

This is the clearest condemnation of reprocessing expressed by the IAEA and perhaps reflects the IAEA's realisation of its inability to safeguard nuclear non-proliferation.

Officially, Japan has pledged never to build or deploy nuclear weapons on its territory. The legacy of Hiroshima and Nagasaki is a strong feature of Japan's political agenda.

However, if Japan continues with its shipments of plutonium from Europe, it will in a decade possess the world's largest stockpile of weapons-grade plutonium, enough to manufacture thousands of nuclear weapons. With such a stockpile, Japan will be perceived as taking the first step towards nuclear weapons capability.

And if Britain and France continue with commercial reprocessing, other countries could follow Japan's lead.

Introducing weapons-grade plutonium into any country will have a destabilising effect and will inevitably stimulate neighbouring countries to acquire similar nuclear weapons capability. This will undermine any regional initiatives to make the Asia-Pacific region a nuclear weapon-free zone. It will also undermine the process of global nuclear disarmament. This is the paradox that repudiates the theory of nuclear deterrence.

The post-Cold War world is on the threshold of a dangerous, second nuclear age. In the 47 years since Hiroshima and Nagasaki, nuclear proliferation meant increasing numbers of nuclear weapons. In the next decades or two, nuclear proliferation could be measured in terms of nuclear capability—stockpiles of plutonium or highly enriched uranium, together with nuclear and missile technology.

We must recognise that plutonium goes into the making of nuclear weapons and is

therefore politically and militarily significant, whether or not its potential to make nuclear weapons is realised.

Conclusion

Enormous stockpiles of highly toxic plutonium are being accumulated as a result of the commercial reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel by Britain and France and the dismantling of the superpowers' nuclear warheads.

The trade in separated plutonium being shipped from Europe by Japan is fraught with the dangers of global environmental contamination in the event of a naval accident en route.

Today the production of plutonium can no longer be justified as it is environmentally hazardous, uneconomic as a nuclear reactor fuel, and it could lead to nuclear weapons proliferation.

In its aim to achieve energy self-sufficiency by accumulating a large stockpile of plutonium, Japan will be perceived as taking the first step towards nuclear weapons capability, which would undermine initiatives to make the Asia-Pacific region a nuclear weapons-free zone and the process of global nuclear disarmament.

It is therefore imperative that the UN and the IAEA make rational decision about commercial reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel and the plutonium trade, the rigorous safety and security requirements for the storage of plutonium, and the potential for another nuclear arms build-up.

There is an urgent need to reform and strengthen the IAEA, which is not a global intelligence agency and has therefore not been able to function efficiently, as shown by its record in Iraq and Chernobyl.

The authority and ability of the IAEA to enforce its stringent laws effectively will depend on the collective political will of the international community to restructure the UN, under whose authority the international control of nuclear materials, such as plutonium, must be securely placed.

The UN has a responsibility to ensure that plutonium proliferation comes to an end by stopping the commercial reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel, the transportation and stockpiling of plutonium, as well as the commercial and military use of plutonium.

(Concluded)
— Third World Network
Features

Dr R S McCoy is a medical doctor and Chairman of the Malaysian Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War.

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.

We hate this

Sir, The demolition of Babri mosque once again exposed the makeshift heroic face of Indian government and political parties. We think that the dictionary is yet to produce word to condemn this barbaric act of Hindu fanatics. Despite the ban from the Indian Supreme Court, the fundamentalists were allowed to assemble and subsequent result came very heart bleeding that caused the loss of so many human lives. Despite the archaeological and historical evidences in favour of the mosque the BJP seemed very reluctant to accept the argument and the modern world with deep shock had to witness the madness of some Indian politicians and idle role of Indian government who are very vocal in calling their state and constitution a secular one. The inci-

dent came at a time when religion is considered a fundamental right and every one is free to perform his or her religion. It is also proved that minorities in India are not safe at the hand of Hindu fundamentalists. Religion is a sacred and sensitive thing that should not be nurtured otherwise at any cost and it is the teaching of every religion to respect others' religion. We are amazed that fundamentalists even did not follow the teaching of their own religion!

We here in Bangladesh are deeply shocked for the loss of so many human lives and property in India and also across the subcontinent following the destruction of Babri Mosque and pray for the departed souls and at the same time hope that sense to respect all religion would prevail among all and the Indian

Government would build the Mosque at its original site.

Md Reyazuddin
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Fundamentalism

Sir, Unambiguously, the sense of religion has entered into human blood jolly strongly from the time when the idea of religion was made. Religion is the chief support for living a spiritually blissful life. People of the modern world, where ways of subsistence are arduous and discomfiting, try to derive peace and satisfaction establishing their faith in religion. Every religion advocates peace, tolerance and humanity. But the advent of religiosity or fundamentalism is a disturbance to the sanctity of religion; it distorts religion by virtually breaking religious rites. Fundamentalists, in fact, have little respect either for God or religion, though they always speak of God and religion. They simply pose great peril to communal harmony.

The Ayodhya incident demonstrates the gruesome appearance of fundamentalism. In India, following the demolition of the four hundred years old Babri Mosque by Hindu

fundamentalists, communal affairs have spread out like an epidemic in different provinces of India and also across the subcontinent. Having heard the news of the destruction of the Babri Mosque the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami and Bangladesh Islami Chhatra Shibir have made some instigating or inducing remarks against the religions other than Islam. They organized some violent processions that culminated in destruction of temples and other Hindu property here. The incidents of damaging temples in Pakistan and England also took place in the same frenzy. Those who have perpetrated these crimes are, apparently, fundamentalists—or inspired by the fundamentalists.

The heinous act of Hindu-fundamentalists has brought for India opprobrium which will be undergone by the people of India for a long time. Bangladesh as well as Pakistan have not been able to circumvent the slander earned by India. These incidents representing barbarism have galloped the people of the whole world having faith in communal amity. Can India and also

Bangladesh be proud of saying that they are the countries of communal harmony? They are rather having abomination from other nations for the incidents which have taken place in them!

The central government of India banned five fundamentalist parties, and some top leaders of Bharatiya Janata Party were arrested for their atrocities. This is, no doubt, a significant step. Is it not possible for our Administration to ban such fundamentalist or communal parties as involved in nefarious activities which are diametrically undemocratic?

The government should remember that fundamentalism is born only to create anarchy in society. It ought to be contained or else the situation the peace-loving countrymen are encountering will never take its exit. It is hoped from the bottom of the heart that our democratic government will do the right thing.

Alok Kumar Saha
Dept of English, DU

VCP licence

Sir, We were surprised to see a news item on the very 1st of January '93 in your es-

teemed daily that the Government has introduced licence for Video Cassette Player (VCP). We are accustomed to see any imposition of new tax during budget i.e. in the month of July only. But on the new year's day, perhaps it was felt easier to silently impose such a huge tax (Tk 500/-) on public without hampering the budget and without agitating public sentiment!

Since a VCP cannot record any programme of BTv, it has got no relation with BTv and question of paying yearly tax to this organisation does not at all arise. I vehemently protest against imposition of such unreasonable tax and hope that soon it will be lifted.

It is to mention here that the escalation of licence fee for colour TV from Tk 300/- to Tk 400/- (i.e. 33%) is also excessive. It should not be more than 5%. Since our salary does not jump by 33% in a year, the authorised persons who decided all these fees are supposed to realise how the people of limited income will afford it.

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