

Cambodian Peace Process in Jeopardy: The UN must Act

The problem of Cambodia will not be resolved if the Khmer Rouge are left in de facto control of some territory along the Thai-Cambodian border. The Thai government may like the idea of a small buffer but in the long run this will be a source of trouble and instability for Thailand and indeed for the whole area.

Crisis in Cold Storage

With the ice manufacturing cold storages showing no sign of softening their stand and the government continuing to ignore the impacts of the strike on the country's economy, a catastrophic gap between demand and supply of some daily necessities stares in the nation's face. If the ice factories are blamable for their intransigence on the question of withdrawal of Value Added Tax (VAT), the government cannot be exonerated from its lapses for not responding in time and in a manner the urgency of the matter calls for. The dispute over VAT was raging at the time of its imposition, but more or less it has now become a settled issue. The ice factory owners have once again raised the issue perhaps not without reasons. But the fact that they have not made their arguments convincing enough, instead they have gone for the ultimate weapon, is proof enough of their indiscretion.

A contentious issue, VAT could be opposed but once it has been introduced, there is no point defying it in a manner the owners of cold storages are doing. Wholesale fish merchants have rightly termed the move illogical, because they are paying VAT all the same. Since the owners of cold storages have no other issues other than withdrawal of VAT, their defiance has not been well supported by reasoning. If they are not aware of their unreasonable action, there must be an authority to make them to listen to the language of reason. On this count, the government cannot shun its responsibility. But its mysterious silence and indifference seems to have contributed to the deterioration of the situation.

What has immediately been hurt is the trade of fish and other perishable items. Tons of fish are rotting without ice treatment. Supply of fruits and vegetables of some varieties is also going to be seriously affected. A whole variety of agricultural produces need services between the intervening period of collection and reaching to the consumers. Reports have it that potato in parts of the country is selling at a price below the production cost. On the other hand, fish price has skyrocketed within weeks. Clearly, the ice manufacturers' strike has set into motion forces capricious enough not to follow any marketing principles. That is why fish registers an abnormal price rise and potato, an item preserved in cold storages, fetches prices below the production cost. There is no scope to take the issue lightly. Switching to market economy cannot be without pain but if irresponsible behaviour is what really hurts, it is indeed a sad day for the nation.

Organised groups have earned here a reputation not to behave quite responsibly. None can beat the transport workers in this respect. But others also seems to have taken the cue from them and are using the weapon rather effectively. The common people become the real victims in the process. The government's job is to coordinate things so that no major break-down takes place anywhere — be it in the social or political arena. Daily requirement certainly heads the list and a serious dislocation there could spell real disaster for the country's administration. If the owners of the cold storages have tried in vain to sit with the government for a negotiated settlement across the table, it surely does not go to the government's credit. After all, the daily loss incurred by the country should be the compelling reason for reaching a solution to the problem.

Bangladesh can only ill-afford to allow its produce to perish for nothing. There is no point letting the stalemate drag on. The sooner the parties involved come to an amicable solution to the problem the better.

The Year 1400

On Saturday a little picture appeared on top of the columns of a classy national daily — depicting a tree bedecked with floral riches. The caption underneath explained why this rather too common a view appeared in so coveted a position. It said we were entering the century's last spring that day. So, the error is symptomatic of the Bengalee race's propensity, more often dangerous than not, of hasty generalisation and conclusion, of nibbling superficially and scratching the surface even where the need is to delve deep into a matter of concern and urgency. The farewell to the 14th century and the advent of the Fifteenth, of the Bengali Era, is of utmost importance to those that hold our tradition and culture close to their heart. Yet many of these ardent lovers of what can very legitimately be called the 'Bengitude' — we expect Nirad C Choudhury to accept the neologism with its potentiality for connoting very limiting aspects of the race as well — are unfortunately mistaking. The current Bengali year for the last of the century and the next, that is, 1400 BS which will start on next Pahela Baishakh or about mid-April for the dawning of the new one. In point of fact the new century will start on Pahela Baishakh of the year 1401 BS.

Many important organisations in Bangladesh and abroad, most of them culture-related ones, have drawn up year-long programmes basing upon that wrong assumption. It is a shame that one detects very famous names of outstanding intellect among those that have associated themselves with these celebrations of the new century.

There are some however, who, although aware of the right day more than a year away, say that the parting of the century can be observed throughout the next year as well as holding the functions welcoming the next century. There can be no argument against that. This present column is indeed a pointer to a serious mistake done by very many people with no message for those preparing for summing up exercises throughout the next year.

There is a happy aspect to the question making it a kind of comedy of errors. One of Tagore's famous poems start by addressing a reader who would be reading the piece a hundred years later. Although he penned it later than exactly 1300 BS, he headlined the poem as 'The Year 1400' there is a third and huge party of people who have been led by this headline into celebrating the year as a reply to the poet's misgivings that perhaps by that year people will have forgotten all about him. A very grand series of festivals is being planned by this third kind of culture enthusiasts.

One mystery will remain ever unresolved. Did Tagore himself commit the same mistake of assuming 1400 to be the first year of the next century? Some mysteries should better be left alone on their mist of uncertainty.

THE much awaited election in Cambodia will be held, between May 23-25, 1993, if the United Nations is successful in implementing its plans. This was announced by the head of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia (UNTAC) Mr Yasushi Akashi. It is rather significant that the announcement was made in Beijing where a meeting of the Cambodian Supreme National Council was held under the Chairmanship of Prince Norodom Sihanouk.

The main problem in implementing the UN peace plan has been the unwillingness of Khmer Rouge to abide by the terms of the agreement. This militant, secretive but well-organised faction ruled Cambodia in the mid-seventies and reportedly murdered a million Khmers in the name of establishing a Marxist society. The gruesome memories of those days still linger. The Vietnamese saved the people of Cambodia from this nightmare but got caught in the Cold War. Instead of getting appreciation it was condemned by the international community for invading a small neighbour. Soviet connection of Vietnam was the main factor in the subsequent developments. The ASEAN countries proceeded on the assumption that the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia was a forerunner of further advances in South East Asia.

Thus the stage was set for a long diplomatic, political and military manoeuvre to get the Vietnamese out of Cambodia. In order to do that the western countries and ASEAN had to take the help of the Khmer Rouge faction led by Polpot. Despite its notoriety for brutality it was the strongest and most well-organized military force which could operate from the sanctuary in Thailand. The Chinese played a crucial role in this affair because it wanted to put pressure on Vietnam, its traditional enemy and the best way to do this was by patronizing the Khmer

Rouge faction in its fight against the Vietnamese occupation forces. Thus Vietnam faced a formidable combination of forces against its continued occupation of Cambodia. Eventually the economic and political pressures on Vietnam proved too much and it voluntarily withdrew its forces from Cambodia in 1990. It is against this background that the UN peace plan was negotiated by the five permanent members of the Security Council. It is perhaps the biggest UN peace-keeping operation and certainly the costliest. Yet its performance until now has not inspired much confidence. The conduct of the UN troops in Cambodia has raised eyebrows but even more important, its effectiveness is considered questionable. Indeed questions are being raised about the competence of the UN to deal with problems of this kind.

No one really liked the Khmer Rouge but under Chinese pressure, no one wanted to have an agreement without it. Besides, its military strength made it difficult to ignore it in any peace plan. The Khmer Rouge was made to accept the agreement, perhaps under the persuasion of China but from the very beginning there was doubt if this faction intended to abide by the terms honestly. In particular it was felt that a guerrilla force which depended on its guns for survival may not disarm and demobilize quietly and become peaceful civilians. This is exactly what has happened. The Khmer Rouge went through the motions of cooperation with UNTAC on certain limited issues but once the basic question of surrendering arms came up the faction had to show its true colours. In hindsight one can see that the Khmer Rouge never intended to surrender its arms. They also did not want to give up

their control of part of the western and north-central provinces of the country where they had established their authority with the connivance, if not the active support, of Thailand. In retrospect it is clear that the peace plan gave all the advantages to the Khmer Rouge. It gave them a military breathing spell. It also gave them a foothold in Phnom Penh in the form of membership of the Supreme National Council.

Since the UN military contingent went there as peacekeepers and not as peace makers, the Khmer Rouge guerrillas could easily consolidate their military hold on areas under their control. It

Khmer Rouge headquarters in Pailin but he did not attack the Khmer Rouge headquarters. This campaign was a violation of the Paris accord but at least it has brought back territories lost to Polpot in recent months. The election will be held in May in areas under the effective control of the government in Phnom Penh. Areas under the Khmer Rouge will not be able to participate in the election. A basic goal of the UN will not be realized. What will be the practical consequence of these developments? The Washington Post in an editorial on January 29 blurted out the truth when it said, 'One part [of the peace plan] that may not be saved is

The problem of Cambodia will not be resolved if the Khmer Rouge are left in de facto control of some territory along the Thai-Cambodian border. The Thai government may like the idea of a small buffer but in the long run this will be a source of trouble and instability for Thailand and indeed for the whole area. If de facto partition is accepted, the Khmer Rouge will continue its guerrilla operations against the Phnom Penh regime from areas under their control, as they did during the last ten years. This fanatical faction will also exploit a growing sense of social injustice and the widening gap between an urban elite in the capital and neglected rural areas. Gary Klinton, a research fellow at the Australian National University rightly said, 'Polpot hopes to use the countryside, where the guerrillas draw most support, to eventually surround and strangle the capital city.' This is not a pretty prospect. The Security Council must review the whole situation so that urgent steps are taken to implement the Paris peace accord in full. The territorial integrity of the country must be safeguarded and genuine peace must return to the country.

According to the latest report on Cambodia, the permanent members of the Security Council have finalized plans to hold an election for a president. This was not there in the Paris accord which provided for only a constituent assembly. Prince Sihanouk is reportedly the only candidate and every body expects that he will be elected without any serious opposition from any quarters. Of course the Khmer Rouge will not take part in any election and so Sihanouk will become president of a divided nation. Did he really want it this way?

A government with Sihanouk as president may ensure the support of the western countries to the new government following the election, but this will not resolve the Khmer Rouge problem. The civil war, in fact, may just continue as before. The present regime, under Hun Sen has been fighting three factions for the last ten years, namely, the Sihanoukist faction, the KPLNF under Son Sann and the Khmer Rouge. In the new situation the Khmer Rouge will fight all of them. One is justified in asking if this is going to happen then what has the United Nations achieved in Cambodia? The root cause of this dilemma, to my mind, is the reluctance of the great powers, permanent members of the Security Council, to deal with the Khmer Rouge. It seems they are more concerned about the possible displeasure of China than about the plight of the poor people of Cambodia. Unless they face this fundamental question, a fair and enduring solution will continue to elude them. Of course there are optimists who believe that without the sanctuaries in Thailand and its logistical support, the Khmer Rouge will simply fade away. This is pipe dream. Unless this faction is brought into the peace process and the unity and integrity of the country is preserved, peace will not come to this troubled land.

I do not believe that the election in May will bring peace to Cambodia. It will, at best, prepare the ground for the next phase in the country's civil war. The great powers directing the UN operation in Cambodia must recognize this hard reality. Will the UN rise to the occasion or will it continue to drift and fumble? Given its poor performance in Bosnia and elsewhere, the small states of the world will lose confidence in the effectiveness of UN's peace keeping operations if it also fails in Cambodia.

ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

should be noted that what is the government of Prime Minister Hun Sen had to cut the size of its forces by at least a third. Polpot forces remained in tact because they flatly refused to disarm and demobilize.

The latest report from Cambodia is an inevitable consequence of these lopsided developments. The government forces have reportedly carried out a military campaign to dislodge the Khmer Rouge from some of their strongholds in north central and western Cambodia. The UN complained but Hun Sen did not listen. After all the Khmer Rouge did not listen to the UN and refused to carry out the steps that they had agreed under the peace plan. According to the latest reports the Phnom Penh regime has already regained the territories it had lost since the peace process began. The UN feared that Hun Sen forces will advance even to the

the hope of keeping the country whole. The Khmer Rouge, the Communist movement that conducted a genocide in the 1970s, refuse either to demobilize or to take part in elections planned for May. The result may yet be partition, with the Khmer Rouge hunkering down in the territory that they control along the Thai border. The note of resignation in these remarks can cause nothing but despair.

Do the poor Cambodians deserve this after suffering aerial bombing, genocide, civil war and economic and social turmoil for some twenty years? The international community must act now to bring the Khmer Rouge within the peace process and hold the election in the whole country. It is necessary the peace-keepers must assume the role of peace-makers and take whatever steps are necessary to demobilize the Khmer Rouge military

Too many Asians? Migration Barriers Rising Down Under

Vincent W Stove writes from Sydney

There is a vocal minority who believe too many Asians are being allowed into Australia. They see the land as some kind of Pacific outpost for white Europeans, preferably British.

OPPOSITION to Australia's immigration programme is growing. The economic worth — as well as the social desirability — of immigration is being increasingly questioned. More Australians than ever before doubt the benefits of immigration and more of them are now prepared to speak out in opposition.

Immigration is no longer one of the sacred cows of Australian politics. Leaders of all parties have long ceased to praise its virtues as they used to. Now they even have to defend the programme to an increasingly sceptical electorate. Few Australians now proclaim 'populate or perish' — the popular slogan of the late 1940s and 1950s which helped drive and sustain the vigorous immigration programme of the period when Australia welcomed refugees and displaced peoples from Europe, but very few from Asia.

Most of those opposing immigration deny their opposition is based on the fact that a larger proportion of Asians now make up the intake mix. But there is a vocal minority in Australia who believe that too many Asians are being allowed into the country. This

group still sees the land down under as some kind of Pacific outpost for white Europeans, preferably of British origin.

Asians now comprise less than 5 per cent of the Australian population of just over 17 million. There are some who believe that one-third of the population will be Asian and another one-third will be part-Asian by the year 2050 when they estimate the population will be 40 million.

Some anti-immigrationists say Australia just cannot support 40 million, claiming while Australia is a big country, only 6 per cent of its area is suitable for crops and pastures, with much of the rest being arid land and uninhabitable. Australia has a land mass almost the size of the United States, but with a population that is less than Texas. With so much open space, there has always been strong opinion to support the view that Australia has a moral obligation to make a liberal immigration programme a prime objective to help relieve population problems in other countries.

During fiscal year 1992-93 some 80,000 immigrants will be allowed into Australia — compared with 111,000 for the previous year. It is likely

that the intake for 1993-94 will drop to 50,000.

Australia's unemployment is being promoted as the prime reason to cut immigration. Unemployment is at its highest level since the Great Depression of 60 years ago. And there is resentment among many unemployed Australians who see employed immigrants as depriving them of jobs. But this is not true of recently arrived immigrants. The unemployment rate among Australian-born people is 10 per cent. Among immigrants who have arrived during the past 18 months, the unemployment rate is close to 40 per cent.

Recently arrived immigrants are being hit more severely by the country's economic recession. But they are still being blamed in some vocal quarters for taking jobs from Australians — even though immigrants usually can only find jobs in those indus-

tries with high risk employment and where there are little advancement prospects.

And recent studies have found that immigrants — the well-educated and the poorly educated — do not contribute to the unemployment of Australians. In fact, immigrants boost overall economy by creating extra demand for goods and services. However, opposition leader Dr John Hewson recently stated that 'in Australia's current circumstances, an immediate and substantial short-term reduction in the number of migrants coming is the only responsible course of action.'

Under a Hewson government, immigrants would have to be resident for four years instead of two before being eligible for citizenship, and they would have to demonstrate basic competence in English.

In addition, they would be obliged to attend classes to become familiar with 'the key facts of Australia's history, the

symbolism and relevance of our flag, the worlds of the national anthem and the rights and obligations of being an Australian citizen.'

It has always been of concern to various Australian governments, and to most Australians, that a large proportion of immigrants have failed to become Australian citizens. One reason has been the requirement to swear allegiance to Queen Elizabeth, the British monarch who is also queen of Australia. This could soon be abolished.

There is also increasing evidence that the poorly educated are no longer welcome as immigrants — especially if they also do not speak English. It is claimed that they place extra burdens on social welfare and government expenses; they have higher than average accident rates, they participate in greater criminal activity, their unemployment levels are higher, and they contribute less to taxation and other government sources of revenue.

Australia, largely because of its isolation, is not the world's most popular destination for boat people, illegal immigrants, the clients of people-smuggling agencies, and asy-

lum-seekers fleeing persecution or harassment in their homelands.

Even so, critics have accused Australia of adopting what they describe as one of the world's tightest and toughest immigration systems administered with unyielding strictness.

As a result, most boat people who make the long and dangerous trip to Australia, as well as other illegal would-be immigrants, soon find themselves on aircraft heading for home.

Of course there are those who do make it into Australia. But are they happy in their new homeland?

It seems that the youngest are the happiest. Research at the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at the Australian National University indicates that elderly immigrants are more likely to suffer mental disorders and commit suicide than Australian-born elderly.

According to the research, immigrants with poor English skills experience more psychological distress in old age than other older Australians. — *Dephneus Asia*

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.

Teaching as a profession

Sir, Your editorial 'Time for Evaluating Teaching' (Star, Jan 26) is timely. The current market conditions have created a disturbing trend which is of concern to the pupils and the guardians, and should draw the attention of the administrators of national education.

The basic issue may be stated with an impertinent, if not pertinent, question: is teaching taken seriously as a profession, by the teachers, in the secondary stage? The question extends to the primary and KG stages in the private sector in the large cities.

What is happening these days in that the teachers of a school open private tutorial classes outside, where the same pupils have to waste duplicate time on the same subjects in order to pass the official examinations.

Is there a double standard of teaching by the same teachers who take classes in the school, and who again coach in the tutorial classes on additional payment? I know of several families where one secondary school pupil has to go to three different coaching classes in three different subjects. It means that one teacher cannot or will not

coach three subjects. Coaching has become specialised for school students! The racket has become a big business, as seen how lavishly such 'push' private schools are spending on TV commercials.

In spite of persistent public demand, the educational policy makers have not yet come out with guidelines regulating the standard and fees of such mushrooming private tutorial centres and/or schools.

Formerly, the young teachers took up teaching jobs on temporary basis, and not as a career, marking time to enter into more lucrative services. Their heart was not in teaching. Nowadays teaching has become a business.

The question arises: where are the decided school teachers who are seriously interested in making a life-long career of teaching? We hear a lot of speeches by the ministers on all issues on earth, but the hot issues are evaded. We are all waiting for this policy and that policy. Nothing serious is being debated in the Parliament — it is a huge waste of time.

Can we have some clear cut directives from the Government based on the motto: teach or get out. A Mawaz Dhaka

They came, they saw, they conquered!

Sir, On the 1st of this month, the West Indies cricket team have retained the Frank Worrell Trophy, defeating Australia by 2-1 in the 5-test series. I would like to congratulate them through your esteemed daily.

The Windies made history at Adelaide in the fourth Test, winning it by one run, and also managing to book Australia for only 184 runs. They also created history by winning the fifth and final Test at Perth by an innings and 25 runs. Moreover, it is not a common sight to see a country winning a series from 1-0 lag behind their opponents and also winning to tests in a row, not to mention winning it on foreign soil. The final Test will be history for them because, this year's Windies was totally new. There were no Richards, Greenidge, Dujon, Marshall et al, Richie steered his team to magnificent victories both in the Test series and the recent World series Cup, and I think that he will be able to be their next 'Clive Lloyd'. Ambrose has again proved to be the saw for ripping up the batting line, taking seven wickets in the span of only 32 balls for only one run, in the final Test; a record which will take a long time to even, if not break!

The Windies have once again proved their supremacy in Test cricket and it was not against a midget, rather the giant Aussies, Brian Lara, Keith Arltherton, Courtney Walsh, Curtly Ambrose and Iran Bishop will be the next genera-

tion Windies heroes, not to mention the captaincy of Richie.

So, before finishing, like the biographers of 'Alexander the Great' would have said, I would like to say the same for my Windies, 'They came; they saw; they conquered!'

Asrarul Islam Choudhury Ronnie, Department of Economics Jahangirnagar University

Barisal Division

Sir, What is this hullabaloo about the so-called Barisal Division? I may be devoid completely in understanding but I find no greater gain than the additional cost to the public exchequer for a Divisional Commissioner and a DIG.

And what a division! The entire area has no (a) Cantonment, (b) Naval Base, (c) Air Force station, (d) Civil air link, (e) railway line, (f) major industry, (g) minerals & power generation. Its fastest means of communication are mere floating prisons. Its precious claims to prominence (beyond AK Fazlul Haque and Kamini Roy) are (i) one or two small consumer industries (ii) de jure head office of IWTA which never really moved in and, of course, (iii) a reigning President.

And if the old district of Barisal can be promoted to a Division, in which way is greater Sylhet or Mymensingh deficient? Are we then deliberately opening the Pandora's box and adding on expenses to the fragile shoulders of the famished public? The only beneficiary are the so-called

civil servants who are, in fact, the overlords. Already there is a DC ruling (i) over a district with two — just two — thanas.

Who pays? And does he have a say? Wg Cdr (Retd) Welayet D Ahmed Kakrail, Dhaka

UN and USA

Sir, It is true that after the collapse of the USSR, we expected the end of the cold war and heralding of the rule of international law. The cold war is replaced by the theory of might is right, as the balance of power is lost with the elimination of USSR.

What Germans did during the Second World War is repeated in the modern world — the victims belong to one religion — the Muslims — in Israel, Bosnia-Herzegovina, India (specially in Kashmir since 1947), the Philippines (Moro), Burma (Rohingya) and Ethiopia, (Eritrea).

The Security Council has become a tool in the hands of the USA. It does not represent the wishes of the comity of nations. Apparently USA is more interested in implementing UN resolution so far it relates to Iraq.

Saddam Hussain has done some provocative works to provide USA an opportunity to re-employ its 500,000 servicemen and machines, which were drawn from Germany, and have control over major oil producing countries.

Opposition forum in SAARC

Sir, I consider the idea of maintaining a SAARC Forum for the opposition political parties of the member countries as inappropriate. I don't know if the SAARC Constitution contains any such provision. In my opinion, a member country within the SAARC represents its respective nation which carries a single national identity where arises no question of opposition or govt parties. The SAARC is an international forum meant for ensuring greater welfare of all the member nations without interfering into one another's internal political activities. If there exist; a SAARC opposition political forum, they will always run the risk of initiating internal disputes through implementation of the oppositions political philosophies in the SAARC spirit, because all the oppositions may not possess the type of political philosophies compatible with the respective national sentiments, aims and objectives. Let other readers contribute their views.

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The USA is silent, so far the violation of other resolutions are concerned. There is no justification to make the civil