

South-East Asian leaders pledge to fight terrorism

Phnom Penh (Cambodia): South-East Asian leaders, stung by plunging tourism and threats to investment, pledged to take joint action against “the evil of terrorism” and to protect foreigners from Bali-style bomb attacks.

“We must take joint measures to fight terrorism,” Cambodian Prime Minister Hun Sen said at the opening of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Summit. “We cannot allow the evil of terrorism to prevail.”

Meanwhile, leaders of China, Japan, and South Korea—also in Phnom Penh for the two-day conference—discussed a possible joint response to North Korea’s recently revealed nuclear weapons programme, seen as a threat to both regional and world peace.

Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi and South Korean Prime Minister Kim Suk-Soo agreed on the importance of resolving the issue, but did not adopt any specific joint actions, Japanese officials said.

Security is the tightest ever for an Asean conference. Streets are barricaded around the meeting site, a fancy hotel, and 5,000 police and military have

been deployed.

Hun Sen has pledged complete safety for the approximately 1,000 delegates at the summit, the largest international gathering Cambodia has hosted in modern history.

The Asean leaders hope to convince the world that they are serious about protecting the region—and visiting tourists and business people—from a growing terrorist threat. But they acknowledge their job will be difficult.

“We are doing our best,” Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad said in an interview published in the Cambodia Daily.

“It is not easy, the fight against terrorism,” he said. “We can erect barriers, increase security, increase our defence capabilities, but that’s not really the way to fight terrorism. To fight terrorists we have to look at the root cause and attend to that.”

Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri told leaders of the steps her government has taken to solve last month’s bombings in Bali that killed nearly 200 people. Separate attacks in the Philippines soon after killed at least 21. AP

5 NOV 2002

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Extremism in Indonesia

By Man Mohini Kaul & Vibhanshu Shekhar

S. B. Kaul
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THE RECENT terrorist attack in Bali seems to have unnerved Australia and its ally, the United States. As most of the dead were Australians, Canberra fears terrorism has come closer to its doorstep, a fear that has intensified with the political instability and deteriorating law and order in Indonesia. A politically weak and economically poor Indonesia has seen the rise of Islamic fundamentalism especially in the aftermath of the 1997 financial crisis. It has threatened the secular and accommodative character of Indonesian Islam. The question uppermost in the minds of the Western nations fighting Islamic terrorist groups is: how far has the Al-Qaeda penetrated Islamic organisations in Southeast Asia? Countries in the region such as Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines would also like an answer to this worrying question. In Indonesia, where the scenario is different, the President, Megawati Sukarnoputri, is in no position to take tough actions against militant Muslims who have been openly espousing violence against the U.S. Her recent comments at the APEC Summit in Mexico clearly indicated this: "We must fight terrorism that might take place wherever, whenever and by whoever... In so doing however, we should not apply the policy that would upset the life of our people and their welfare." In fact, no Indonesian political leader would like to openly support stringent action against Islamic extremists as it is also linked with the growing anti-U.S. feelings in the country which has the world's largest Muslim population.

Extremist forces in Indonesia have stressed orthodoxy in social norms recommending the Sharia as the basis of social conduct, prescribing headscarves for women and the use of Arabic language. All this is alien to Indonesian culture, especially on the island of Java. Quite often, anti-Western sentiments have led to anti-Christian feelings resulting in sectarian violence. Since January 1999, Maluku province, known as the Spice Islands, has witnessed one of the worst religious conflicts in the history of independent Indonesia. The most disturbing aspect of this conflict has been the involvement of non-local Muslim militia, which had been sent

by the Lashkar Jihad outfit from places such as Jakarta to fight Christians. The riots also highlighted the political inertia of the existing Government in combating these Muslim terrorist groups. The widening support for radical Islamic outfits is evident from the patronage extended to them by some Muslim political parties which insist on Sharia as the basis of governance and tend to practice majoritarian politics focussing on Muslim votes. These

Help from the West in putting down the Islamic radicals will be seen by most Indonesians as interference in their country's affairs and further jeopardise the present secular leadership.

parties insist on the inclusion of the Jakarta Charter of 1945 in the Constitution in order to transform Indonesia into an Islamic state. However, the majority of Indonesians have not supported the Charter which states "obligation for (Muslims) followers to adhere to the Sharia". The People's Consultative Assembly quite comfortably rejected the Jakarta Charter and agreed to retain the original wordings of Article 29 which states, "The state is based on one God." Analysts argue that the extremists "are only a small minority of the Muslim political community".

Indonesia has witnessed the emergence of various groups espousing radical ideals. The Jemmah Islamiyah, supposedly established by Hambali and Abu Bakar Ba'asyir, calls for establishing a super Islamic state in Southeast Asia comprising Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, the southern regions of Thailand, the Philippines and parts of Cambodia. The Lashkar Jihad and the Jemmah Islamiyah have been involved in raising Muslim militias to fight Christians in different parts of Indonesia. Another extremist organisation, Islam Defenders Front (FPI) led by Habib Rizieq Shihab is based in Java. Its militant wing is Lashkar Pembela Islam. Both the Lashkar Jihad and the FPI are alleged to have received support from the military. There are other radical organisations such as Hizbul Thahrir and Lashkar Sabilah. However, these are not cohesive and certain amount of rivalry exists in their approach and

objectives. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Indonesia is an offshoot of the mass mobilisation efforts in the 1990s when political space was created for radical Muslim groups. In order to remain in power and regain popularity, the discredited Suharto regime and the Golkar Party began to woo groups such as the Association of Indonesian Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI) and the Indonesian Coordinating Board of Preachers (BAKOMUBIN). In

undermining the liberal traditions of ordinary Indonesians.

The growing fundamentalism has not only vitiated the environment for social cooperation but also created conditions for the rise of terrorist networks in Indonesia. The lack of governance in the outlying islands, the growing anti-U.S. feelings among Indonesians and the lacklustre leadership of Megawati have made the country a safe haven for terrorists. Indonesian society is being polarised along religious lines, which are creating dissensions and tensions among various ethnic groups. Apart from widening the social cleavages, the growing religious intolerance is also encouraging secessionist movements in some parts, bringing the nation to the brink of disintegration. The rise of extremist and secessionist forces has destabilised the political process and caused irreparable damage to the economy. The large-scale attacks on ethnic Chinese, mainly involved in business activities, resulted in their being forced to move out of Indonesia hampering economic development. It is estimated that since May 1998 more than \$20 billion has gone out of Indonesia as it is no longer viewed as a safe place for investment.

The aggressive pursuit of the religious agenda by extremist political parties has pushed the secular forces on the defensive. Consequently, the Government has been hesitant in condemning outright the Islamic extremists and has reacted cautiously on sensitive issues such as international terrorism, the role of Islam in politics and sectarian violence. Paradoxically, the increasing acceptance of radical Islam has limited the Government's scope in tackling this problem while the Government's hesitancy has further strengthened the radical forces. Since Indonesia is no Philippines, help from the West in putting down the Islamic radicals will be seen by most Indonesians as interference in their country's affairs and further jeopardise the present secular leadership. Also, there is a real danger of the evolving democratic process being put on hold by the Army in case things get worse.

(The writers are, respectively, Associate Professor and Research Scholar, Southeast Asian Studies, JNU.)

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Malaysia hits out at U.S. ✓

S. S. An

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, OCT. 6. Political dissent in East Asia over America's current plans to disarm Iraq and change its leadership has gained new momentum.

Malaysia today articulated this evolving sentiment by voicing dissent over the perceived U.S. tendency to treat might as right. The Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister, Abdullah Ahmad Badawi, raised the stakes to a new pitch through a paper distributed to the "young leaders" attending a two-day "East Asia economic summit" that began in Kuala Lumpur today under the auspices of the World Economic Forum. The summit was inaugurated by the Prime Minister of Thailand, Thaksin Shinawatra. The Malaysian action follows yesterday's completion of a sensitive diplomatic essay by a ranking U.S. official, James Kelly, who held talks with North Korea's officials for three days as part of what is seen in some sections of East Asia as America's differential strategies to break the alleged "axis of evil" that brackets North Korea with Iraq and Iran.

Mr. Kelly's parleys in Pyongyang signified an approach that was different in its diplomatic nuances from the current U.S. strategy of presenting Iraq with the Hobson's choice of compliance with a set of demands. It is against this background that Malaysia today launched a scathing attack on the U.S. policy. According to Mr. Abdullah

Badawi, "values and norms matter as much as institutions and laws". He underlined that "might cannot be right, for that is the law of the jungle (and) not the ethics of a civilised world". His punch line was "one nation cannot demand that another nation change its Government ... or else". No nation possessed the right to wage war on another without the authorisation of the United Nations Security Council, he emphasised. Moreover, individual nations should not permit themselves conduct, which they condemned in others.

"The right to dissent is as much a right in the international arena as it is in the domestic domain. It must be respected. Dissent does not make you a foe", Mr. Abdullah said in a clear reference to the U.S. In a further direct comment on the current U.S.-Iraq stand-off, he said: "U.N. resolutions must be respected and fully implemented by all, not just a few, or just one.

Here in East Asia, we must also resolutely defend the democratic right of nations to form their own groupings for (any) legitimate common cause".

Defending East Asian regionalism, which encompasses the 10 members of the Association of South East Asian Nations plus China and Japan as also South Korea, Mr. Abdullah called upon these states to "work together for a better international political order" and to reflect "the dispersal of power among (the) nations of today".

THE HINDU

7 OCT 2002

Anti-terror campaign creates a backlash in S-E Asia

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, SEPT. 29. While the U.S. is tracking China on the diplomatic radar screen for any sign of Beijing's eventual position on the current American strategic moves to unseat Saddam Hussein of Iraq in an anti-terror swoop, Washington's articulation of its overall "anti-terror agenda" is alienating two other key countries in the Asia Pacific region.

These other countries, Indonesia and Malaysia, are not in the same category as China, a veto-exercising permanent member of the United Nations Security Council.

As a result, while China is in some ways sought to be wooed by the U.S., Indonesia and Malaysia have begun to express their dismay over certain perceived aspects of Washington's attitude towards them.

The Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, today brushed aside the resentment within his country over the apparent American disapproval of the pace at which Kuala Lumpur is carrying out its own anti-terror drive.

Dr. Mahathir told Malaysian journalists that his administration "doesn't do things for other people to appreciate".

He underlined that "we do things because they are right".

He was also critical of Canada's new move to institute a visa regime for Malaysians in the current context of a heightened security alert.

The Malaysian Foreign Minister, Syed Hamid Albar, was more direct in regretting the perceived tendency of some Western countries to bracket

Malaysia with international terrorism in spite of Kuala Lumpur's anti-terror measures in recent months.

Emphasising that Malaysia was among the countries that launched a definitive anti-terror initiative, Mr. Hamid Albar said that his peaceful country should not, therefore, be subjected to prejudice on the international stage.

Malaysian laws such as the Internal Security Act, which provides for detention without trial, had indeed facilitated Kuala Lumpur's proactive anti-terror drive, he maintained.

The political leaders in Malaysia as also Indonesia, both Muslim-majority states and members of the Organisation of Islamic Conference, have embarked on a political offensive at home to let the U.S. know that they should not be tarred with the terrorist brush in the current sociological context of the West's anti-terror agenda.

It was only two days ago that the Malaysian authorities put out a list of eight men wanted for suspected terrorist activities while detaining another person who was said to be linked Jemaah Islamiyah, which is believed to be a pan-regional terrorist outfit in South East Asia.

Malaysia has detained over 60 persons since last December on terrorism-related charges.

In Indonesia, the Vice President, Hamzah Haz, has flayed the West for hurling "baseless accusations" against Indonesia to the point of treating it as a virtual hotbed of terrorism. "The baseless accusations should stop or the Indonesian

people may get angry", Mr. Hamzah Haz said.

The Vice President, who heads Indonesia's largest Islamic political party (the United Development Party), indicated that the Government might find it difficult to reign in the escalating public anger against the West at this time.

His authoritative comments have now added political spice to the recent warnings by the leaders of two of Indonesia's premier Muslim organisations the Nahdlatul Ulama and the Muhammadiyah.

These two leaders, Hasyim (Hashim) Muzadi and Sja'fi Maarif, had already cautioned America against generating a backlash against the West by treating Indonesia as an advancing new frontier of international terror.

In separate but related developments, Abu Bakar Baasyir (Bashir), the Indonesian cleric on America's terror watch list, has asked Jakarta to snap diplomatic ties with Washington, while the Indonesian Foreign Minister, Hassan Wirajuda, said his country and Russia would cooperate to combat terrorism.

The American terror watch has become a contentious issue not only between Jakarta and Washington but also on the Indonesian political front itself.

The Vice-President was conspicuously absent from a Cabinet meeting that called upon the Muslim clergy to help the Government launch a crack-down against terrorists.

The meeting was presided over by the Indonesian President, Megawati Sukarnoputri.

30 SEP 2002

THE HINDU

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Terrorism dominates Megawati-Mahathir talks

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, AUG. 8. The leaders of three main South-East Asian countries — Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand — met today to explore new avenues of co-operation.

The separate summit between the Indonesian President, Megawati Sukarnoputri, and the Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohammad, acquired importance in the context of the anti-terror declaration that the United States and the Association of South-East Asian Nations signed in Brunei last week. Dr. Mahathir's willingness to co-operate with the U.S. in the ongoing campaign against global terrorism has already brought him unusually close to Washington. Given the U.S. suspicions that some critical pockets of South-East Asia might be accessed by the al-Qaeda and its local allies for new terrorist sanctuaries, a prime regional issue is about Indonesia's political will and security capabilities to prevent the terrorists with al-Qaeda links from acquiring a new base.

Dr. Mahathir today threw his

weight behind Indonesia in this regard and pointed out that Indonesia was not more susceptible to forays by the terrorists than the other key countries were.

Such regional consultations on anti-terror issues are a sequel to the recent U.S.-ASEAN declaration and the U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell's identification of Indonesia as a potential new partner of America in the campaign against terrorism.

On a different note, the simmering new tensions between China and Taiwan remained manageable today even as the diplomatic circles in the Asia-Pacific region took note of the latest indications of a further climb down by Taipei and of a no-nonsense stand by the U.S.

The present crisis over the fragile political equation between Beijing and Taipei was set off by a statement by the Taiwanese President, Chen Shui-bian, last weekend.

He had expressed himself in favour of a referendum in Taiwan to settle its political future in the context of China's insistence on reuniting Taiwan with

the mainland as soon as possible. Taiwan's official panel that shapes relations with mainland China is quoted as saying today that there are no imminent plans to hold a plebiscite and that a referendum might be considered only if Beijing were to force the Taiwanese to make a choice against their wishes.

More important to the regional scene than this reinforced message from Taipei was the indication from Washington that the Bush administration would not like the Taiwan-China standoff to worsen the security situation across the Taiwan Straits. Attributed to a spokesman of the U.S. National Security Council is the observation that "the U.S. has a one-China policy and we do not support Taiwan independence."

China has, through its practised style of reacting to Taipei at different echelons of the state apparatus, made it abundantly clear that Mr. Chen's "splittist" moves would not be countenanced and that military force might be considered, if necessary, to uphold the principle of one-China that would encompass Taiwan as well.

Moves in Myanmar

By Paolienlal Haokip

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THE RELEASE of Aung San Suu Kyi, leader of the democratic struggle in Myanmar (Burma), from 19 months of house arrest on May 6 was indeed an event of historical significance. The general perception seems to be that the event could be the beginning of the end of military rule, and more importantly, of political conflict in Myanmar. It is also widely perceived to be the outcome of the efforts of the United Nations through its envoy, Razali Ismail, in trying to bring about a national reconciliation within Myanmar. However, things may not be as simple and, without sounding conspiratorial, it could be said that Ms. Suu Kyi's release could well be another of the many acts up the sleeve of the SPDC (State Peace and Development Council).

A close look at Ms. Suu Kyi's release may reveal more disappointments than hope for the realisation of the twin ideals of democracy and national reconciliation that Myanmar desperately needs. For one, her release implies that the military Government is confident that a free Ms. Suu Kyi no longer threatens it as in 1992, and that talks can now be held under the parameters set by the Junta. This confidence may not be entirely baseless. The Junta has over the years, beginning from the crushing of the August 8, 1988, democratic uprising, largely succeeded in minimising the political appeal and support base of Ms. Suu Kyi through its rightist propaganda and sermons about the priority of national unity over democracy. It has also managed to divide the main opposition National League for Democracy, led by Ms. Suu Kyi, and the ethnic nationalities by taking advantage of the fact that the two have different priorities. Restoration of democracy is topmost on the NLD agenda, and, for this reason, the party has been tactfully avoiding the signing of a Panglong-type pact (a pre-independence agreement signed in 1947 between the ethnic groups and Aung San, Ms. Suu Kyi's father, which provided for some ethnic national groups to have the op-

tion of seceding from Burma 10 years after the country's independence or to have liberal packages of autonomy) with the ethnic groups saying the nationalities' question can and should be addressed only after democracy is restored. On the other hand, comprehensive autonomy, if not independence, comes first for the ethnic groups. Democracy for them does not necessarily spell self-determination or autonomy — the ideals for which a majority of them had taken up arms decades ago. The military Junta, by negotiating cease-

Political stability through national reconciliation, rather than the issue of democracy restoration, needs to be seen as the core issue in addressing a lasting solution for the political turmoil in Myanmar. The dominant-periphery conflict is a much more vexed issue than is often held to be. Unless a lasting remedy for this problem is devised, democratisation of the polity alone is not likely to end Myanmar's search for peace and political harmony. In this regard, it may be contended that the militarisation of Burma since the 1962 coup was

“development of national reconciliation will succeed in as much as the tripartite talks are successful”. However, there has been no response from the other side. Apparently, that section of the polity is again being given the go-by when others proceed to decide their destiny. Backdoor consultations with them will not be enough, if that is what is being done. Groups such as the Shan, the Chin, the Karen and the Mon with existing states should be given the opportunity to spell out the measure of autonomy they require and the feasibility of accommodating such demands within a federal polity examined. Besides, there are certain national groups such as the Pa-U, Palaung, Wa, Lahu, and Kuki that are still striving for a state of their own within Myanmar. These groups should also be included in the talks and their demands of territorial states and autonomy within a federal Union considered. More than any other single factor, it was the nationalities' question that engendered the political turmoil in Myanmar. These groups have been the primary victims of human rights violations within Myanmar. The problem of national reconciliation therefore needs to be settled with the full participation of the concerned national groups.

It would not be too late to involve them now. The political process in Myanmar must co-opt the ethnic factor for any lasting political arrangement, whether under a democracy, a quasi-democracy or military rule.

The talks should ideally be between the Junta, the NLD and the leaders of the various ethnic groups, supervised and moderated by the U.N. Unless the degree of U.N. intervention is increased and the principle of unity in diversity upheld in the final outcome of the talks, the mistakes of history in Myanmar are bound to be repeated, and this time, with far greater political and economic costs.

(The writer is Research Scholar, Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, JNU.)

The political process in Myanmar must co-opt the ethnic factor for any lasting political arrangement.

fire agreements and promising the ethnic groups state autonomy under the new Constitution drafted by it, has, to a certain extent, neutralised their support for the democratic movement and has been able to minimise armed engagements with them, which had cost both sides heavily in the past. The struggle for the restoration of democracy would have had better prospects with the involvement of the ethnic groups. The release of Ms. Suu Kyi has also to be seen in the context of the Junta's desperation for legitimacy, internationally as well as inside the country. The move is aimed at gaining some international acceptability, which could result in the easing of economic sanctions against the regime. Internally, it could help buy time for the military to complete its future designs for a permanent say in the governance of the country. This means that any democratic Government emerging out of the talks has to be a compromised one. Given these facts, the prospects of the restoration of democracy do not seem to have taken a giant leap with the release of Ms. Suu Kyi and some of her colleagues in the NLD. However, the release did signal a progression from the earlier deadlock between the SPDC and the NLD.

not the outcome of any inherent Burmese dislike for democracy or even the failure of the democratic regime preceding the coup to deliver the goods; but a consequence of the failure of the democratic regime to honour the Panglong agreement which promised optional independence and/or autonomy to the minority national groups such as the Shan, the Mon and the Kachin. The element of rightist Burmese aspirations of domination and the subsequent 'Burmatisation' of the country where the national groups assimilate and reconcile themselves to the dominant group's ideals and interests was foremost in the military's scheme of things.

The international media had been abuzz with the role played by Mr. Razali in facilitating talks between the military and the Leader of the Opposition, but had nothing on his efforts to involve the ethnic nationalities in deciding the future of their country. Five Myanmar pro-democracy ethnic groups, in a press statement released from Yangon on May 15, called to be included in national reconciliation talks between the military junta and Ms. Suu Kyi. The groups, led by the Shan National League for Democracy (SNLD), welcomed the release of Ms. Suu Kyi and stated,

Filipino, Malaysian troops to undertake joint drills

Philippine Daily Inquirer/Asia News Network

2/7

MANILA, July 1. — Philippines and Malaysia are to begin this week small-scale joint military training exercises in the northern Philippines, a Filipino army spokesman said today.

The six-day exercises are scheduled to begin on Wednesday. The exercises will involve less than 100 Filipino troops and will mostly involve classroom training, said the Filipino army's Lt Col Michael Manquiquis here. "This is more of a classroom training, doctrine and most of the time, Philippine and Malaysian troops would work side-by-side on the tables," Lt Col Manquiquis said.

He did not say how many Malaysian soldiers would take part in the joint exercises. Military sources however said that some 75 Malaysian army troops will be participating in the annual training, which began in 1998.

Malaysia last year hosted the training exercises in Sabah, near the Philippines' southern sea border. Both countries are also involved in joint patrol exercises and, along with Indonesia, are bound by a tri-lateral agreement to combat regional terrorism.

THE STATESMAN

**Malaysia, Singapore
to meet on water
agreement**

JOHOR BARU, June 11. -- Long-term water agreement, the use of Malaysian air space by Singapore military jets and central provident fund withdrawals by peninsula Malaysians will be on the agenda when Malaysia and Singapore officials meet in Kuala Lumpur on 1 and 2 July.

Foreign minister Mr Datuk Seri Syed Hamid Albar, who will lead the Malaysian side, said the meeting would "concentrate of the issues" in which both are well versed.

— The Star /ANN

THE STATESMAN

12 JUL 2002

Thai-Myanmar ties hit a new low

S. S. Anin (A) 6/6 RD-15

BANGKOK, JUNE 5. Their armies square off along their 2,080-km border. Ethnic minority guerillas stir the pot, playing off one country against the other.

A huge cross-border drug trade adds to the volatility.

While the border between Thailand and Myanmar may not rank as an international flash point on the order of Kashmir or West Asia, it holds the potential for new instability in Southeast Asia.

In a bloody attack that could push the two countries' relations to the breaking point, unidentified gunmen shot up a Thai school bus near Myanmar border, killing three children and wounding 14 others.

Thai forces searched for the perpetrators on Wednesday.

The bus attack, which took place on Tuesday, is bound to have serious repercussions.

The identity of the attackers remains unknown, but Thai officials suspect extremists opposed to the Myanmar Government, trying to make trouble between the two nations.

The latest round in a rivalry that goes back centuries began on May 20 on Thailand's northern border.

Myanmar says the Thai mil-



A hilltribe couple with their child and belongings flee the fighting in the Chiang Rai province, 680 km north of Bangkok, on Wednesday. — AP

itary shelled its territory to support Shan ethnic rebels' attacks on Myanmar army outposts. Thailand says it merely fired warning shots across the border after the fighting spilled onto Thai soil.

Myanmar's military Government has since closed the four main border checkpoints with Thailand — cutting off lucrative

trade routes — and banned Thai officials from visiting.

Other Myanmar reactions have verged on xenophobic.

Private magazines in Myanmar's capital, Yangon, were ordered to expunge all references to Thailand, including advertisements for Thai products.

State-controlled media now refer to Thailand as 'Yodaya', a condescending term referring to the old Thai kingdom of Ayutthaya, which was sacked in 1767 by a Myanmar army on elephants.

In Thailand, schoolchildren and foreign visitors are still told tales of the invaders' bloodcurdling atrocities.

The major factor in the Thai-Myanmar equation is the desire of Myanmar's sizable ethnic minorities for autonomy. — AP

Armed monk storms Thai Parliament, held

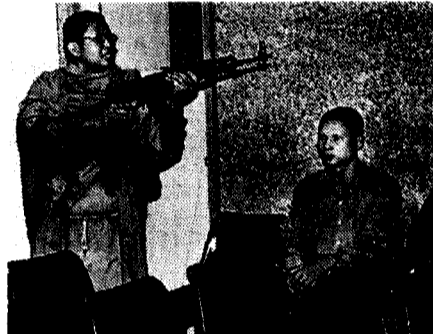
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BANGKOK, MAY 22. A young Buddhist monk was arrested on Wednesday after storming Thailand's Parliament with an assault rifle, taking about 30 people hostage and demanding to speak with the Prime Minister. No one was injured.

After a one-hour standoff during which he berated authorities by mobile phone and fired an AK-47 assault rifle into the air once, the monk was captured by three plainclothes police posing as reporters who grabbed the gun and handcuffed him. The monk, who wore a traditional saffron yellow robe, said he was from a province in south-eastern Thailand and was in his 20s.

Before being arrested, he demanded to be allowed to talk with the Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, saying that he wanted to protest "unjust treatment" he suffered when arrested by police several years ago.

Speaking into a reporter's mobile phone, the monk said in a lengthy speech that was broadcast live on radio and television that he was arrested in 1996 for trespassing in a national park and was beaten and stripped by police. He said that authorities had not responded to his complaints. The chaos

began at about 8:30 a.m. local time, just minutes before Thailand's 500-member elected Lower House was set to debate



A Buddhist monk brandishes an AK-47 assault rifle as he shouts to police and reporters after taking hostages at an office in the Thai Parliament in Bangkok on Wednesday. — AP

a much-anticipated no-confidence motion against 15 Cabinet members in Mr. Thaksin's 14-month-old Government.

A woman entering the Parliament building to listen to the debate said that the monk threatened to kill her and others. "He stormed into the reception office where I was and said, 'Don't move or you'll get yourself killed,'" said Pratuang Mongkolsil, 53. "Then the monk went out and shot once and came back. I was so frightened."

The monk identified himself as Sayan Chitasuro from the south-eastern Chanthaburi province, bordering Cambodia. — AP

THE HINDU

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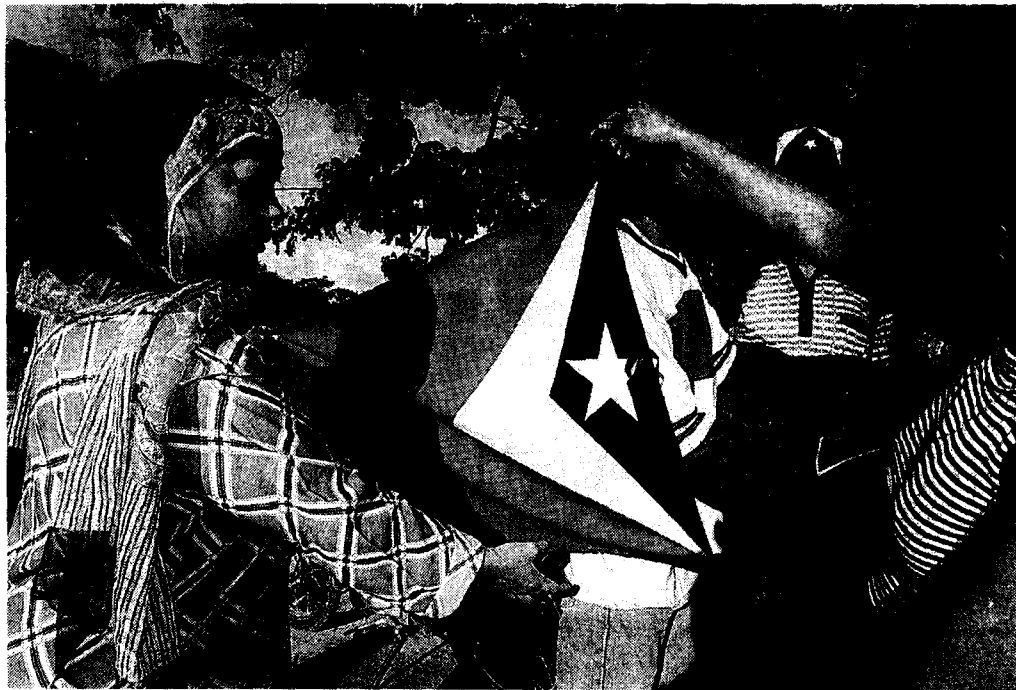
Nascent nation waits for date with destiny

DILI (EAST TIMOR), MAY 18. Armanda Andrade has just come home after three years in exile. Her seven children are covered in sores brought on by impoverished life in a refugee camp. The country she has returned to is one of the world's poorest.

Now, as East Timor prepares for independence this weekend, she says it's a time for hope. "We don't have to be scared anymore. We don't have to run," Ms. Andrade said on Friday, squatting on the floor of a refugee reception centre and quietly keeping an eye on her children.

Despair is giving way to hope and pride, yet independence raises many questions: How well can a devastated nation with a 400-year-old history of foreign domination run its own affairs? Will powerful Indonesian generals, angered over losing the territory, allow it to live in peace? Will settling old scores take precedence over nation-building?

The U.N. Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, the former U.S. President, Bill Clinton and the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, will be among the dignitaries attending the independence celebrations. Fireworks will go off at midnight on Sunday with the raising of the East Timorese flag, a white star on a background of red, yellow and black.



An East Timorese woman (left), examines the new nation's flag in Dili on Saturday, ahead of the independence day celebrations beginning at midnight on Sunday. —AFP

low and black. Then East Timor's first head of state will be sworn in. He is Xanana Gusmao, a 55-year-old poet and former guerilla leader who spent more than six years in jail and house arrest and was elected President in a U.N.-supervised vote.

The VIP likely to attract the most attention is the Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri, whose political career has been marked by outspoken opposition to East Timorese independence.

Her decision to attend the celebrations has drawn fierce

criticism from some hardline Indonesian lawmakers. In an apparent attempt to deflect that criticism, she will visit a cemetery containing the graves of some of the 3,000 Indonesian soldiers who the government in Jakarta says died during Indonesia's 24-year occupation of

East Timor. East Timor is a half-island with a population of 800,000, one speck of land in the 3,000-mile-long archipelago that is home to 200 million Indonesians. The nascent country is about 14,000 square kilometres in size. The relationship between the two countries will be a fragile one, with East Timor constantly watching for any sign that Indonesia's military is still supporting anti-independence militiamen who live in refugee camps on Indonesian West Timor.

U.N. approves mission

Meanwhile, the Security Council on Friday approved a new U.N. mission of 5,000 U.N. troops and 1,250 international police to help the fledgling nation build a democratic government and maintain security.

The Council unanimously approved a resolution authorising the mission for an initial period of one year after rejecting a last-minute U.S. attempt to include an amendment.

The council voted 15-0 to approve the United Nations Mission of Support in East Timor, known as UNMISSET, which will bolster the new country's administration and law enforcement capabilities and help maintain internal security and secure its border with Indonesia. — AP

Row over Indonesian ships visiting East Timor

By Amit Baruah

SINGAPORE, MAY 18. A four-hour visit by the Indonesian President, Megawati Sukarnoputri, to East Timor for its Independence Day celebrations on Sunday continues to create ripples. The East Timor Foreign Minister, Jose Ramos-Horta, has complained bitterly of an Indonesian decision to send six ships into East Timorese territorial waters ahead of Ms. Megawati's arrival.

Mr. Ramos-Horta said in Dili today: "There was no such thing as a security arrangement. We did not agree for Indonesia to bring in six ships or so." He made it clear that just one ship would be allowed to dock and only unarmed Indonesian military personnel could come ashore.

"We are not angry, just puzzled with this ostentatious display of navy hardware that obviously is not a good public relations exercise for Indonesia in the eyes of the Timorese and major powers such as the U.S.," the Foreign Minister remarked. "We have asked Indonesia to move its ships to international waters and we are allowing the medical vessel to stay in our territorial waters as a matter of courtesy."

Separately, a report in *The Jakarta Post* said today that a 2,000-strong task force of army, navy and air force personnel had been set-up to "safeguard" Ms. Megawati's four-hour visit to East Timor.

A military spokesman claimed that the U.N.'s

Transition Administration in East Timor had allowed Indonesia to station its ships off the coast of Dili. The spokesman said that the security of all invited guests, which included the U.N. Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, and the former U.S. President, Bill Clinton, was the responsibility of the East Timor administration, but the Indonesian military would "not take any risk, considering that the celebration will be in open air, at night".

The Indonesian position is unlikely to sit well with ordinary East Timorese, as well as those in authority, given Indonesia's past in East Timor. Indonesia forcibly annexed East Timor into its territory and was finally forced to hold a referendum in 1999, which was won easily by those pushing for the country's independence.

The East Timor leadership had done well to invite Ms. Megawati to Dili for the Independence Day celebrations, with the President-elect, Xanana Gusmao, personally handing over a letter of invitation to the Indonesian President in Jakarta. After this gesture of goodwill, Indonesia's bizarre naval decision would appear to suggest that Jakarta still does not recognise the reality on the ground — that a new nation will come into being on Sunday night. In refusing to recognise this fact, the Indonesian military appears to be setting a policy course that the civilian leadership has done nothing to counter.

THE HINDU

Prospects for Southeast Asian diplomacy have brightened with India's renewed interest in the region, writes JAMES CASTLE

Megawati trip heralds diplomatic realignment

A fundamental diplomatic realignment is under way in Asia. Whether by accident or design, Indonesian President Megawati Sukarnoputri's just concluded tour of China, India and Korea is a profound reflection of this reality. The war on terrorism is merely a sideshow. It would be a mistake for Indonesia's friends to make it the cornerstone of bilateral relations.

The President's most substantive visit was to China. The reciprocal visits of Chinese Prime Minister Zhu Rongji to Indonesia last November and Ms Megawati to China in March signal the desire of both leaders to put past bilateral troubles behind them. Sino-Indonesian ties have been warming steadily since diplomatic ties, broken in 1967, were restored in 1990. The courtship was derailed by the Asian crisis. 11 September presented challenges and opportunities to the two governments and gave new impetus to the process.

China, the world's most populous country, is attracted by abundant natural resources including oil and gas, timber, coal and palm oil of Indonesia, the fourth most populous country in the world. China's broader strategy has been to rebuild its geopolitical clout in Southeast Asia through strategic trade and investment activities.

Indonesia, in addition to its desire to penetrate the China market, for its large offshore gas reserves, is also eager to seek other trade opportunities and mobilise the strength of its own commercially dominant ethnic Chinese minority. But a much deeper game is also being played. China is eager to expand its presence in the region as part of what it sees as its natural rivalry with Japan and the USA. Indonesia is eager to reduce its financial dependency on Japan and the USA and develop foreign policy alternatives to counterbalance the aggressive demands of Washington in the anti-terror struggle.

It is not that Indonesia supports or is soft on terrorism. Rather, there is a growing resentment of what it sees as the overbearing attitude of the USA and the short-term

thinking that seems to drive its ambitions in the region. This sentiment existed before the Asian crisis and 11 September. These crises merely exacerbated it. Indonesia naturally sees China as a potential counterweight to the USA. This dovetails with China's concerns about the USA which are as much the product of its own grand vision of itself as a dominant world power with the USA as its only true rival, as it is of any specific acts of the USA.

The major economies of developing Asia have long been seeking new forms of developing Asia have long dependency. This desire had its expression in the early 1990's in the struggle for policy supremacy between Apec (Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation) and the EAEG (East Asia Economic Group). Australia and the USA supported Apec.

Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad championed EAEG. Apec was winning the battle for the minds, if not the hearts, of Asian leaders when the Asian financial crisis occurred. The crisis weakened Apec and gave new impetus to the search for alternatives.

The EAEG concept resurfaced in a new form as a potential financial support system to rival the International Monetary Fund. This proposal did not go far because of US opposition and the huge financial burden it would have placed on the moribund Japanese economy, the only one in the region with the wherewithal to make an Asian Monetary Fund a reality. But though nothing concrete emerged, the sentiments they reflect cannot be ignored. One thing the proposals had in

common was the exclusion of Caucasian countries, including Australia, which has never been able to convincingly portray itself as part of Asia.

The prospects for Southeast Asian diplomacy have become even brighter with the renewed interest of India in the region. India is once again attempting to reassert itself diplomatically in the region. The collapse of the Soviet Union liberated India from its awkward alliance with a socialist comrade and made it easier for its political leaders to experiment with market-based economic solutions. As India moves out from 50 years of economic autarky into the global arena, it will become a vital source of investment and trade to rival China in the region.

Indonesia is particularly well-placed to benefit. The political thinking of Indian independence leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru helped provide attractive concepts for adaptation by Indonesian nationalist leaders like Sukarno, Mohammed Hatta and Sutan Sjahrir in the 1930's and 1940's. Gandhi's principles of cooperation and swadeshi or self-sufficiency took deep root in the Indonesian koperasi movement and concepts like *berdikari* (standing on one's own feet) and *mandiri* (independence).

The elitist democratic socialism of the Indian Congress Party provided the intellectual underpinning for the creation of Indonesia's vast state-owned enterprise system that burdens the economy today. And Indonesia's dismal romance with its own cooperative movement still remains a powerful ideological force in

Indonesian bureaucratic thinking. The February visit of six Indian MPs to Brunei, Malaysia and Indonesia is a sign of India's new diplomatic offensive. The delegation included two Indian Muslim MPs. Its purpose was to promote India's position in its dispute with Pakistan over Kashmir, where India wants to neutralise Indonesia's natural sympathy for Muslim Pakistan against Hindu India. The picture becomes more complex when Japan's interests are considered. It was no coincidence that Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi visited Indonesia and the other four founding members of Asean in February, proposing a hastily conceived Japan-Asean trade cooperation scheme barely two months after China and Asean had inked a similar pact in Jakarta. Japan was shocked by China's proposed free trade area with the Asean. It always considered Southeast Asia its natural sphere of influence. But the region sees China in the ascendancy and Japan in the decline.

Despite representing the world's second largest economy, Japan's diplomats have always punched below their weight. This is due both to Japan's reluctance to assume policy leadership and political sensitivities resulting from the abuses of the Japanese military that occupied much of Asia during World War II. Asia's geopolitical story of the 21st century will be the re-emergence of Chinese and Indian influence in the region. Will this be at the expense of Japanese and American interests or in concert with economic growth and political dynamism to the mutual benefit of all? Indonesia is in an ideal position to channel this inevitable competition into constructive aid, trade and investment channels. Ms Megawati's trip was a positive step along this road.

(The author is president, Jakarta Office of the American Chamber of Commerce.)

— The Jakarta Post/Asia News Network

Indonesia frowns on Singapore minister's statement

The Jakarta Post/ANN

JAKARTA, Feb. 26. — Indonesia reacted strongly to Singapore senior minister Mr Lee Kwan Yew's jibe that Indonesia was allowing alleged terrorist masterminds to roam free.

The Singapore government backed it up with a diplomatic gesture that it would allow Indonesia police greater access to information.

Singapore in particular has charged Muslim cleric Abu Bakar Ba'aysir is a figure who needs to be rounded up.

But Indonesian authorities claim there is little concrete evidence to backup these claims. Singapore leader Mr Amien Rais' described Mr Lee as "a mouthpiece" for

the USA.

No one doubts the political will to exorcise this menace, not least Indonesia who's people have been a constant victim of, and continue to live under the spectre of terror.

The root of the row is the appropriateness of Mr Lee's comment and the oversensitivity of Indonesians themselves. Mr Lee's remarks along with the immediate and pragmatic Singapore government defence of it demonstrated a thoughtlessness to the sensitivities in which South-east Asian camaraderie has been so carefully built upon.

If Singapore did have stronger evidence to back up its claims would it not have been within its obligation to pass on the information and allow access to authorities here to begin with?

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