

Vietnam moves closer to USA

SB Khai
Vietnam ✓
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Associated Press

HANOI, June 19. — Vietnamese Prime Minister Mr Phan Van Khai departed today on a groundbreaking visit to America, seeking closer ties with Washington and support for Vietnam's bid to join the World Trade Organisation.

Mr Khai's 19-25 June visit to USA is the first by a Vietnamese Prime Minister since the Vietnam War ended 30 years ago.

Mr Khai said that his presence in USA would symbolise that the two countries have put resentments over the war "behind us."

Mr Khai departed just after dawn on a Vietnam Airlines jet bound first for Seattle, where he was to oversee the purchase of four Boeing jetliners by Vietnam Airlines and meet with business leaders including Microsoft



Mr Phan Van Khai waves from a plane before he leaves for the USA. — AFP

Corp. chairman Mr Bill Gates.

Following his summit with US President Mr George W Bush on Tuesday, Mr Khai will travel to New York, where he will ring in the session at the New York Stock Exchange. He will end his trip with a stop in Boston to hold talks with the presidents of Harvard University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Mr Khai had earlier said eco-

nomie and social reforms in Vietnam along with increased trade, defence and diplomatic cooperation with the US had converged to produce the best timing for the visit. They're also set to talk about democratic reforms in Vietnam, religious rights, and stepped-up military cooperation. Despite the potential for disagreements, Mr Khai said that his visit alone symbolised a major improvement in relations.

"My presence in the United States reflects that we have put the past behind us," Mr Khai said in reference to the Vietnam War.

Emigres protest visit

Hundreds of Vietnamese emigres in California protested against Mr Khai's visit to the USA, saying the communist government needs to improve its human rights record.

20 JUN 2005

THE STATESMAN

ASEAN dilemma over Myanmar drags on

HD-15

Suu Kyi's birth anniversary celebrations placed Yangon in an awkward position

P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE: The worldwide celebration of the 60th birth anniversary of Aung San Suu Kyi, Myanmar's pro-democracy leader, once again placed the military government in Yangon in an awkward position last weekend.

However, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) has not yet indicated its decision on Myanmar's credentials to chair the group in 2006. The ASEAN Foreign Ministers agreed in April to defer a final decision on whether or not Myanmar

should assume the chairmanship of the regional outfit for 2006. As a collective entity, ASEAN then left it to Myanmar, a member, to decide "soon" whether it would want to press its case for chairmanship, given the unease among several of the group's major dialogue-partners about allowing the Yangon regime to preside over it.

ASEAN's overall move of placing the ball in Myanmar's court was accepted by it, even as the group used the diplomatic prose that "it would be best to decouple the two issues" - namely, Myanmar's turn to chair ASEAN next year and the

association's practice of non-interference in the domestic affairs of its member-countries.

According to Singapore Foreign Minister George Yeo, there was, on that occasion, "great reluctance" on ASEAN's part "to take away Myanmar's [possible] chairmanship," as that might only set "a bad precedent".

At the same time, ASEAN was "in danger of being dragged into Myanmar's internal politics because of the chairmanship issue which, in turn, could complicate Myanmar's internal political situation". ASEAN's dilemma will be

compounded if Yangon were now to press its claim to chair ASEAN, under the rotation principle, by hoping that the United Nations' appeal for Ms. Suu Kyi's release from prolonged detention might not be translated into serious action.

As for the other possibility of a more balanced view by Yangon, the Myanmar leaders recently told Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong that theirs was "not a selfish country" and that they would take into account ASEAN's views and consider its interests.

Child dies in school siege

Police, intruders in gunbattle in Cambodia

Siem Reap, June 16

MASKED GUNMEN seized dozens of children at an international school in north-western Cambodia on Thursday, killing a 3-year-old Canadian boy and threatening to shoot the others one by one before the police rescued the remaining hostages, the authorities said. The attackers stormed Siem Reap International School on Thursday morning, seizing dozens of young children from several countries and demanding money, weapons and a vehicle before the police ended the six-hour standoff, taking four into custody, at least one of them wounded.

The gunmen killed the boy when authorities declined to meet all of their demands, and the police then raided the school compound, Cambodian information minister Khieu Kanharith said, quoting the deputy national police chief, Neth Savoeun.

"They also threatened to kill the children one by one. Then our forces decided to storm the school," Khieu Kanharith said. He described the victim as a 3-year-old Canadian boy, although that could not be immediately confirmed by Canadian Embassy officials.

Gunshots were heard by witnesses just before the children fled the school and the gunmen were seized. Denis Richer, a Frenchman who said he teaches at another school in the booming tourist town, also said he saw one of the hostage takers laying wounded on the ground after the police ended the siege. He said he saw the authorities take four men away. The identity of the attackers was not clear, even after the standoff ended.

Prime Minister Hun Sen, in a speech at the

defence ministry in Phnom Penh, said the four masked men "were private security guards at the school." He said the attack was not a terrorist action but "rather an isolated criminal act. These security guards are in their 20s, and they had been hired to guard the school." Cambodia has a serious problem with street crime in its cities. Hun Sen's remarks were apparently based on early reports from the scene.

Information minister Khieu Kanharith had speculated that the attack could have been carried out for political motives, to discredit Cambodia and hurt its tourist industry.

Local police said late on Thursday that the attackers were criminals aged 22 to 25 from the southeastern province of Kandal, and that teachers did not recognise them.

"Four hostage-takers have been arrested. There are only four of them," deputy military police commander Prak Chanthoem said after the crisis was over.

The crisis unfolded at Cambodia's tourism hub of Siem Reap, near the famed Angkor temples and home to many expatriates, and quickly drew concern from governments around the region. The town has many establishments serving the international tourist trade, and children from at least 15 nations attend the school.

According to Prak Chanthoem, the attackers had demanded \$1,000, six AK-47 assault rifles, six shotguns, B-40 grenade launchers, hand grenades and a car. He later said \$30,000 and a van were given to the hostage takers, but they still refused to free the hostages.

AP /

17 JUN 2005

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

US raises Suu Kyi's detention in UN

S. B. in Myanmar
11/13
26/6

United Nations: The United States raised the plight of Myanmar's detained pro-democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi and 1,300 other political prisoners in the



United Nations Security Council — but Russia and China blocked a discussion of actions by the country's ruling military junta.

Deputy US ambassador Gerald Scott said the administration of President George W Bush felt it was important to remind the international community "that the situation in Burma contin-

ues to decline."

When Scott raised the issue under "other matters" at a closed council meeting on Friday, diplomats said Britain, France, Denmark, Romania and Greece echoed US concerns but Russia and China objected to putting Myanmar on the council's agenda. Unless an issue is on the council's agenda, it cannot be formally discussed. AP

Suu Kyi's ordeal

Democracy deserves better

It was sad, but perhaps to be expected that the world reacted momentarily, and then mutedly, to the fact that Aung San Suu Kyi spent her 60th birthday, too, in captivity. While there were protests by her supporters in various places around the globe, these were reduced to displays in tokenism because nations, unlike individuals, were circumspect in their reaction. The ordeal to which Suu Kyi has been subjected to by Myanmar's military junta is of relevance to every country in the region. India and Thailand, in particular and by virtue of being the only two functioning democracies in Myanmar's neighbourhood, have a special responsibility. As the world accepts with increasing cynicism the triumph of a military dictatorship over a pro-democracy movement, nations in the region that uphold liberal values and the rule of law, must remind themselves constantly of the virtues of their way of life. One way to do so is to condemn unequivocally, and at every opportunity that presents itself, such regimes as the one in Myanmar. India has suffered a totalitarian regime, and ought therefore to be especially sensitive.

Thailand, a founding member of Asean, has a more immediate concern. Myanmar is due to take over the leadership of the South-east Asian grouping next year. While countries like Singapore and Malaysia have their own notions of democracy and are unlikely to agonise over the prospect of being led by a military junta, Thailand is a substantial stakeholder in the community of democratic nations. It plays an important role in Asean, and must therefore do all it can to highlight one of the greatest tragedies of our times. Suu Kyi and democratic values deserve to be remembered more than once a year.

23 JUN 2005

THAI STATE

Global chorus for Suu Kyi's freedom

Myanmar democracy leader under house arrest turns 60; spends birthday alone

YANGON: Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, the detained leader of Myanmar's pro-democracy movement, turned 60 on Sunday alone and under house arrest as her supporters here and around the world demanded her freedom.

For the woman known affectionately as "The Lady", the day was probably much like any other in the past two years she has been under house arrest, allowed no visitors besides a doctor and with her telephone line cut.

But at the headquarters of her National League for Democracy (NLD), hundreds of people gathered to mark the occasion. Security was visibly tighter than normal there and outside her home.

Ten Buddhist monks in orange robes started the day by chanting at dawn inside the dilapidated NLD headquarters. Supporters later clapped and prayed as 10 doves, representing peace, and 60 colourful balloons were released.

Security forces watched and videotaped the event.

Inside the headquarters, NLD central executive committee chairman Aung Shwe read a statement before about 400 guests including diplomats, saying the party prayed for the "longevity, blissfulness and proper health" of Aung San Suu Kyi.

He also hinted at the party's readiness for talks with the ruling junta.

"I dare say that there would be no difficulties to hold dialogue with the leaders of the armed forces for the establishment of democracy and human rights for the benefit of the nation," Mr. Aung Shwe said.

Police briefly detained 10 NLD members for wearing traditional longyis in the NLD's official colours of orange and brown, and released them only after they changed their clothes, party sources said.

A small group of elderly Myanmar politicians known as

• Telephone lines to the leader's house cut

• Event at party office videotaped

• Thai university awards doctorate

• NLD hints at readiness for talks with junta

the Veteran Politicians Group marked Ms. Suu Kyi's birthday with a separate service in Yangon at which five more monks recited prayers as the group called for her release and urged the military to open talks with her party.

World leaders' call

World leaders including U.S. President George W. Bush and the Foreign Ministers of Germany and Myanmar's former colonial ruler Britain also called for Ms. Suu Kyi's release and praised her as a symbol of freedom.

In Thailand, the respected Thammasat University in Bangkok awarded an honorary doctorate in political science to Ms. Suu Kyi. It was accepted by one of her representatives.

The award was originally bestowed in 1991 but never given because she has been under house arrest for nine of the past 16 years.

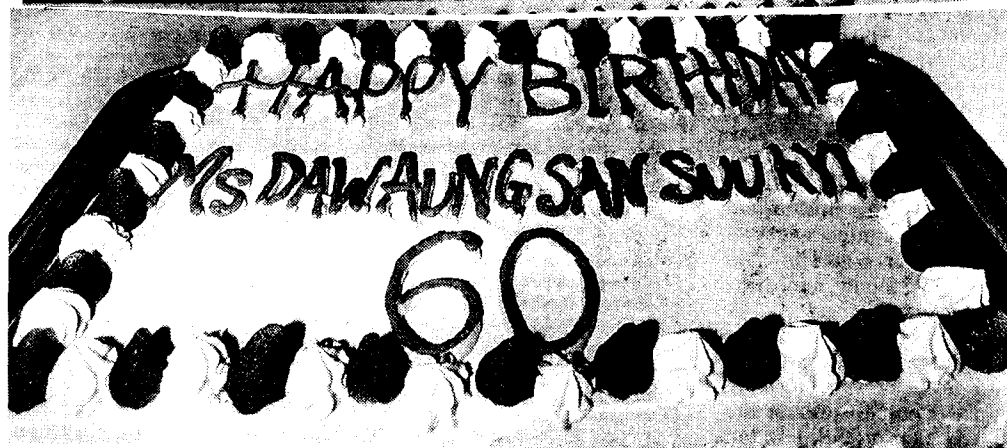
In Malaysia, about 50 human rights activists and Myanmar expatriates met to call for Ms. Suu Kyi's release and for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to not let Yangon assume the chair of the ASEAN regional bloc in 2006.

Ms. Suu Kyi may be able to hear of the protests on a short-wave radio, but few expected the global calls for her release to sway the country's reclusive generals, who have shown themselves impervious to international demands even in the face of crippling U.S. and European sanctions. — AFP



"Please use your liberty to promote ours."

Aung San Suu Kyi
www.dassk.com



SYMBOL OF PEACEFUL RESISTANCE: A portrait of Myanmar leader and Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi is placed by a cake to mark her 60th birthday, in Tokyo on Sunday. — PHOTO: AP

Rights body raps India, Thailand for backing junta

Associated Press

BANGKOK, June 9. — The support given to Myanmar's junta by Thailand, India and China undermines other countries' efforts to promote democratic reforms there, a leading human rights advocate said today.

Many countries, such as the USA, have instituted political and economic sanctions against the

military regime to try to put pressure on the ruling junta, said Mr Brad Adams, head of the Asia division of New York-based Human Rights Watch. The junta, however, is "able to withstand that pressure because of support from China, Thailand and India," he said at a news conference to mark the release of a report on the displacement of ethnic minorities inside Myanmar.

Mr Adams said "all roads for

change" lead through the three countries, major aid donors and investors in Myanmar.

'Myanmar's junta is able to withstand sanctions because of support from India, China and Thailand'

Mr Adams was particularly critical of Thailand's policy under Prime Minister Mr Thaksin

Shinawatra, who took office in 2000. He said the dominant attitude among the Thai leadership was in the worst case to block Myanmar dissidents in Thailand from expressing their views.

He charged that Mr Thaksin — whose family controls a telecommunications conglomerate that does business with Myanmar — and members of his government have business interests in Myanmar which they weigh

against human rights concerns.

Mr Adams also lambasted India, which enjoys increasingly close political and economic relations with Myanmar's junta, which it once ostracised.

Justifications for India's warming relations with the junta were hypocritical, he said, suggesting that as the world's largest democracy, India "should be at the forefront of pushing for political change".

Partition an error: Dalai Lama

VIR Sanghvi
New Delhi, June 20

IT MAY not be L.K. Advani's view but the Dalai Lama believes that the Partition of India was a big mistake and an unfortunate event. The success of Indian secularism, the Tibetan leader said, evidenced by the fact that there are more Muslims in India than in Pakistan, shows that the Indian model is the best for the region.

In an interview to *HT*, the Dalai Lama said that Acharya Vinobha Bhave had it right when he spoke about a federation that included India, Burma (now Myanmar), Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), Afghanistan, Pakistan and other countries in the region. The Dalai Lama believed that such a conglomeration would be best for the people of the region.

He contrasted India's democratic and secular traditions with those of China. "No matter how much people may complain about inefficiency and corruption," he said, "Indian democracy has very strong roots. And Indian secularism as defined by Mahatma Gandhi does not mean 'no religion' but freedom to all religions."

Nevertheless, the Dalai Lama conceded that China had made remarkable economic progress — "almost a miracle," he said. Tibet, he felt, could gain from China's prosperity and economic development.

It was because of such considerations, he

explained, that he does not demand independence for Tibet. Rather, he wanted full autonomy and a fully-functioning democracy where Tibetans could elect their own leaders.

At present, he said, the Chinese were engaged in 'cultural genocide', wiping out all traces of Tibetan culture and flooding Tibetan cities with immigrants. "In most of our cities now," he added, "Tibetans have been reduced to a minority."

The Dalai Lama said he had no major disagreements with the Indian government despite Delhi's recent recognition of the Tibet Autonomous Region as an integral part of China. His concerns, he said, were not with Chinese sovereignty but with Tibetan autonomy.

"Today, when the whole world is coming together, I am not saying

that we want to separate. We only want to preserve our culture and live in a democratic society. By opposing us, it is the Chinese who are being split-ist," he said.

The Dalai Lama is optimistic that eventually Beijing will meet the aspirations of the Tibetans. "The Chinese are a very proud people," he said, to explain why Beijing has been so unyielding. "But now Tibetan Buddhism centres are opening all over China and a new generation is ready to take over." His hope is that autonomy will be more acceptable to a new generation of Chinese leaders.

On Page 2: There may not be another Dalai Lama



Indian model of secularism is the best for the region

Plebiscitary democracy

S B Araya
Philippines

9/7/17/6
An American writer once groused that the problem with the Philippine version of democracy was its plebiscitary nature: that is, Presidents tend to address political questions by submitting them to referendums.

Advocates of the parliamentary system might take

heart in this observation since, after all, what is a "snap election" but a plebiscite (at least, in the sense of the elections called by Ferdinand Marcos in 1986 and proposed by Joseph Estrada in 2001)?

Plebiscitary democracy is arguably the more mainstream approach to political leadership, and not just in purely parliamentary systems. Anglo-Saxons are sceptical of plebiscitary democracy because they view it as pandering to the mob, when the fundamental purpose of representative democracy in the British and American tradition is to place the governing power in the hands of a sober ruling class; or, as Sergio Osmeña Sr put it, a "directing class."

It was in defence of this idea that he fought Manuel Quezon (in 1922), who preferred a government of "issue-by-issue referendum."

The idea of plebiscitary democracy is fundamentally that of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the French political philosopher, who felt the distrust of the many should be replaced with a healthy confidence in the wisdom of the majority view.

In other words: the Anglo-Saxon conservative view is to entrust government to elected professionals; the radical French tradition is to throw major questions to the people for them to fight over and then decide.

And so it was that on 28 April, 1969 President Charles de Gaulle of France resigned after his proposal to strip the French Senate of much of its power was rejected in a referendum. His example is particularly interesting because of the strong interest our political class has shown in the French model (a President with real powers, but a parliamentary legisla-

Those confident that the public can best decide the question of a President's continued fitness for office reflect the innate idealism of the Philippines' revolutionary past, writes Manuel L Quezon III

ture).

Our political class has been fundamentally divided along these two lines since 1922, at least – even if today's politicians no longer have the depth of learning and cosmopolitan education the generation raised under Spain possessed. The political class reared in the 19th century looked to France for its radical notions, and to Britain and the USA for its conservative ideals.

Anyone surveying the Constitution will see at once

a fundamental distrust of broad executive power – a tendency institutionalised, ironically, by Quezon who used the Senate as a battering ram against the Executive that was then headed by an American governor-general (as chief executive, Quezon bewailed this reality); Osmeña, on the other hand, never fully trusted the notion of plebiscitary democracy, as he was not, by nature, a demagogue.

Our mainstream politics has been a history of national

divisions and of plebiscites.

The first was the question of a secret society's romantic notions of liberty, with its radical notions of meritocracy versus the desire to impose order under the authority of a professional class composed of the home-grown aristocracy: Andres Bonifacio's Magdiwang versus Emilio Aguinaldo's Magdalo.

The second was the question of permanent political union with the USA as espoused by the federalists, and political autonomy as espoused by the Nationalists, in the 1907 elections. Then there was the question of a purely representative government, as espoused by Osmeña, or a government by public opinion, as championed by Quezon, in 1922; and the question of loyal collaboration with Leonard Wood or legislative opposition to him, in that same year.

There was the question of settling for an independence law as the best that could be achieved, or risking something marginally better, in 1933.

There would be divisions over the giving of parity rights to the Americans in 1946; on the question of sticking to the old guard under Elpidio Quirino or embracing a new generation under Ramon Magsaysay, in 1953; in the political contest cunningly turned into a referendum on collaboration with the Japanese by Ferdinand Marcos against Sergio Osmeña Jr in 1969; and then the series of sham referendums under martial law, culminating in the biggest referendum of all, the snap election of 1986.

In the last, desperate hours of his presidency, President Estrada turned to the Marcos model of a snap election for a

dignified exit. There, too, is the nature of the midterm election as a referendum on the incumbent.

Since the birth of the modern presidency in 1935, the midterm election decides whether the President would be turned into a lame duck or not.

Even without the present controversies hounding the administration, it will face judgment at the polls in 2007.

Today's political discussions only prove where American influence on our political culture ends, and its residual confidence in French revolutionary idealism begins. Take this extract from an American scholar, Claes Ryn:

"Descendants of the Rousseauistic spirit in the large societies of today usually recognise the need for elected representatives who can act for the people, but they also believe that precautions must be taken to ensure that those representatives will faithfully carry out the wishes of their constituencies.

"Anything less is a betrayal of popular sovereignty. Among the ways of guaranteeing adherence to the current popular will are short terms of office for elected representatives, the possibility of recalling or censuring public officials, and referendums on issues of public policy."

So, I say: those confident that the public can best decide the question of a President's continued fitness for office reflect the authentic, innate idealism of the Philippines' revolutionary past, and represent the authentic traditions of the Philippines' mainstream political past.

— The Philippine Daily Inquirer/ANN



Philippine President Gloria Arroyo: People's power

ANTI-GOVT STIR FAILS TO MOVE PHILIPPINES PRESIDENT

S.B. Asia
Philippines
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ARROYO ADAMANT



President Arroyo greets the crowds at an independence day celebration in Manila on Sunday. — AFP

Philippine Daily Inquirer/ANN

MANILA, June 12. — Anti-government protests calling for the ouster of President Gloria Arroyo failed to gather huge crowds today as the embattled leader called for unity and said she was undeterred by threats against her rule.

Security forces were on high alert throughout the day, guarding highways around the capital while riot police were on standby in vital installations.

About 200 left-wing protesters had a brief shoving match with

police as they converged to hear an impromptu mass held by a Roman Catholic priest outside a seminary where a former intelligence official was seeking refuge.

The official, Mr Samuel Ong, on Friday came out in public as the source of controversial taped conversations between Ms Arroyo and an elections commissioner conspiring to cheat in last year's polls. He said his life was in danger.

The President, however, has resisted calls for her resignation, and has urged unity. "I am calling on everyone to do away with dirty politics and focus our energies to improve the

economy," Ms Arroyo said in a speech to mark the country's proclamation of its independence from Spanish rule 107 years ago.

"My countrymen, the flag is the symbol of power and determination. Mark it in stone, I will show this power and determination to uphold democracy and guide the country in the right direction."

Ms Arroyo's family members have also been accused of accepting bribes from operators of an illegal numbers game called "jueteng", the same allegations that were the basis for former President Mr Estrada's impeachment and ouster.

Police warn of anti-Arroyo coup plot

Philippine Daily Inquirer/ANN

MANILA, June 8 — A destabilisation plot of "grand design" was being planned against the Arroyo government as the President fights corruption allegations against her and her family, senior police officers warned today. They added that policemen are being recruited to take part in it.

Quoting "highly reliable intelligence reports", Philippine Na-

tional Police chief Mr Arturo Lo-pibao said "deliberate disinformation, sensationalised scandals, and unfounded rumours" were part of the anti-government drive.

"The seat of government power is besieged anew by a malicious effort to throw it off balance by way of a seemingly elaborate and grand design at destabilisation," the police chief said in a statement. "The PNP, under my leadership, will ensure that any further step at destabilisation that

borders on the illegal and with willful criminal intent, shall be addressed accordingly by uncompromising police action," he said, adding that like the military, the police stood "squarely behind" the leadership of President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo.

Meanwhile, police spokesman Mr Leopoldo Bataoil told reporters that policemen were also being recruited. "We have received intelligence reports that the PNP is being recruited (for

destabilisation). The statements come amid days of swirling rumours about a possible coup and twin scandals that threaten to implicate Mrs Arroyo's husband and son in illegal gambling payoffs and herself in alleged vote rigging at last year's election.

Ongoing Senate hearings into an illegal numbers game, jueteng, have heard witnesses claim that the President's husband and son received payoffs. Both have denied any links to illegal gambling.



President Arroyo is alleged to have indulged in vote rigging.

Emergency in Malaysia

The Star/ANN

KUALA LUMPUR, Aug. 11. — The Malaysian government has declared a state of emergency as the haze smothering the Klang Valley hit extremely hazardous levels.

The haze emergency has been declared indefinitely for the entire Kuala Selangor and Port Klang areas with immediate effect. All work places are to remain closed except for essential services, food shops and supermarkets.

Prime Minister Mr Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said the emergency status was declared only for the two areas as the API (air pollutant index) had breached the 500 mark. He, however, stressed that the emergency did not imply a curfew and the Selangor state government would continue to monitor the two places.

Indonesian officials warned that the blazes, caused by illegally using fire to clear land in Sumatra, would worsen in coming weeks.

The Malaysian Prime Minister also instructed the State Management and Disaster Committee to take the following actions:

- Issue an order the closure of all government and private offices and other work places including factories, plantations, construction and quarries.
- Ensure that earthwork and earth movement are stopped.
- Advise the reduction of the use of private vehicles.
- Ensure the closure of all schools.
- Ensure the frequent dissemination of information of the pollution index to print and electronic media.
- Get the media to advise the public to remain at home and steps that needed to be taken by the people.

■ Get the information ministry to ensure that information is disseminated directly.

■ Ensure strict enforcement against open burning.

■ Ensure that this emergency declaration does not include declaration of curfew (except for certain situations as provided for under the appropriate laws).

Meanwhile, Indonesian and Malaysian ministers are meeting in Medan today to discuss how Malaysia can help the republic put out the raging fires in Sumatra.

Indonesian forestry minister Mr Malam Sambat Kaban and representatives of Indonesian environment minister Mr Rachmat Witoelar are expected to be present. Malaysia will be represented by natural resources and environment minister Mr Adenan Satem and plantation industries minister Mr Peter Chin.

12 AUG 2005

THE STRAITS TIMES

S. B. Bar
P. M.

Trouble ahead for Arroyo

8718

Philippine Daily Inquirer/ANN

MANILA, Aug. 30. — The Committee at the House of Representatives asked to deliberate on the impeachment complaints against President Ms Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo adjourned its hearing tonight after rejecting the amended version of the original, filed by lawyer Mr Oliver Lozano.

The justice committee voted 52-2 on the first prejudicial issue, with Makati Representative Mr Teodoro Locsin Jr and Bataan Representative Mr Antonino Roman supporting the Opposition's amended complaint. Mr Locsin, a member of the ruling Lakas-Christian Muslim Democrats, said that despite his vote he was not likely to sign the Opposition-backed complaint. Mr Roman of the Liberal Party said he might sign the amended version, should the committee vote for the dismissal of the complaint.

The committee will resume its hearing

tomorrow to debate on the second prejudicial issue on whether the original complaint by Mr Lozano bars the amended complaint and the one by lawyer Mr Jose Rizalino Lopez. If the committee decides that the original complaint prohibits the filing of the two other complaints under the Constitution, it would then proceed to the determination of form and substance of the Lozano complaint. Cebu Representative Mr Eduardo Gullas said.

Mr Gullas said that should the body find the complaint "sufficient in form and substance," it could proceed to determine its probable cause. He said pro-impeachment lawmakers could still elevate the revised version to the Senate if they could muster 79 signatures, which is one-third of the total 236 membership of the House. "If they have the required number, they can easily reverse whatever the report of the committee in the plenary said," he said.

Members of the majority bloc denounced the walkout staged by the pro-impeachment group.



Papers fly as Opposition members walk out from an impeachment hearing against President Gloria Arroyo in Manila on Tuesday. — PTI

THE STATESMAN

মায়ানমারে অভ্যুত্থান নিয়ে জোর জল্পনা

ব্যাঙ্কক, ২৪ অগস্ট: গত চার দিন ধরে প্রকাশ্যে দেখা যায়নি থান শোয়েকে। এমনকী টেলিভিশনেও চোখে পড়েনি মায়ানমারের এই সামরিক শাসককে। জোর জল্পনা, নীরব অভ্যুত্থান ঘটে গিয়েছে মায়ানমারে।

সোমবার ক্যাবিনেট বৈঠকের সময়ে তাঁকে নাকি ক্ষমতাচ্যুত করেছেন সেনাবাহিনীর দ্বিতীয় প্রধান মাউং আয়ে। মায়ানমারের প্রতিবেশী দেশ তাইল্যান্ডের একটি সংবাদপত্রে এই খবর বেরনোমাত্র তা ছ হ করে ছড়িয়েছে। গুজবের সত্যতা যাচাই করছেন



থান শোয়ে

তাইল্যান্ডের গোয়েন্দারা। তবে ইয়াঙ্গনের অবস্থা শান্তিপূর্ণ। রাস্তায় নামেনি বাড়তি ফৌজ। ব্যাপক ওলটপালট হওয়ার কোনও লক্ষণ দেখা যায়নি।

এমনকী, মায়ানমারের বিরোধী দল ন্যাশনাল লিগ ফর ডেমোক্রেসি-র মুখপাত্র নিয়ান উইন জানান, এখনও পর্যন্ত তাঁদের কাছে যা খবর রয়েছে, তাতে এই গুজব সত্য নয়। আর থানকে দেখা যাচ্ছে না কেন? কূটনীতিকদের অনেকে অবশ্য বলেছেন, থান ইয়াঙ্গনের বাইরে

রয়েছেন বলেই তাঁকে দেখা যাচ্ছে না। তবে মায়ানমারের গণতন্ত্রপন্থী একটি সংবাদপত্রের সম্পাদক সু মিন্ট দিল্লিতে বলেছেন, “আমি যা শুনেছি, সোমবার মায়ানমারের জেনারেলদের সাপ্তাহিক বৈঠকের সময়েই মাউং আয়ে ক্ষমতা দখল করেন। মায়ানমারে নৈরাজ্য তৈরির অভিযোগ তোলা হয়েছে

জেনারেল থানের বিরুদ্ধে। তার পর থেকেই মায়ানমার সম্পর্কে কোনও খবরই পাওয়া যাচ্ছে না। এমনকী, বৈঠকের খবরও না।” পাশাপাশি, তাইল্যান্ডের একটি সংবাদপত্রের মতে, ২৩ অগস্ট মধ্যরাতে একটি হাসপাতালে

গ্রেফতার করা হয়েছে থানকে। জল্পনা, মায়ানমারের তৃতীয় প্রধান জেনারেল থোরা শোয়ে মানকে থানের বিরুদ্ধে অভিযোগের তদন্তের ভার দেওয়া হয়েছে।

অবশ্য তাইল্যান্ড সরকার এখনই গুজব নিয়ে ভারতে নারাজ। তাইল্যান্ডের বিদেশমন্ত্রী কাস্টাথি সুফামোঙ্গখোন বলেছেন, এ সব এখনও পর্যন্ত পুরোটাই গুজব। এ মাসের শেষে মায়ানমারে যাওয়ার আমার যে পূর্ব নির্ধারিত কর্মসূচি রয়েছে, তা এখনই বাতিল করা হচ্ছে না। — রয়টার্স

25 AUG 2005 ANANDAPAZAR PATRIKA

Aceh peace still faces hurdles

1678 SB Asia Indonesia HD-15
 Government policies will be needed to prevent sabotage of the peace deal

JAKARTA: Although optimism abounds right after the Indonesian Government and the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) signed their third peace agreement on Monday in Helsinki, Finland, political, economic and social problems still loom large in the archipelago's resource-rich Aceh province.

There are strong reasons for believing that the Helsinki peace deal will eventually work. First and foremost, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono and Vice-President Jusuf Kalla have a strong mandate from the people to implement the peace deal, as they were directly elected by the people.

Meanwhile, unlike earlier agreements, the Helsinki peace deal has received strong backing from various quarters, including the National Police, the Indonesian Military (TNI), and top political parties. The Acehese people are also tired of three decades of war that has claimed thousands of lives. This can contribute to the success of the deal.

Under pressure

In addition, the Government and the GAM have come under strong international pressure to create a conducive climate for the reconstruction and rebuilding of Aceh, much of which will be financed from abroad. The above factors provide a good momentum for lasting peace in Aceh.

It is now up to the Government and the GAM to show that they are really committed to peace. With the foundations for a lasting peace having been laid, both the GAM and the Government have a lot of work to do. Both parties must address the technicalities surrounding the demand by the GAM that it be allowed to establish a local political party. Because Indonesian law does not permit local political parties, the existing legislation will have to be amended.

Besides laying the groundwork for the establishment of a local party, the Government also needs to prepare a plan for the granting of amnesties to convicted GAM members. There is al-

ready a plan to provide GAM members with houses and land, but how this will be implemented remains to be seen. The scheme will cost the Central Government dearly.

Inevitably, the provision of houses and plots of land for GAM members is likely to spark social envy as many Acehese are still suffering from hardship in the aftermath of the tsunami disaster. This issue also needs to be seriously addressed by the Government. In order to handle the looming social problems in Aceh, a massive public information campaign will be needed to convince the Acehese to accept the amnesty programme.

The Government must make people aware that compensation for GAM members is the price that must be paid in order to ensure lasting peace in Aceh. Like it or not, the Government must take measures, including providing financial incentives, to "compensate" the TNI for losing "a lucrative battleground". There are allegations that war-related "business" activities have been rampant during the military operation in the province.

Meanwhile, effective Government policies will be needed to prevent irresponsible parties from sabotaging the peace deal. Some quarters have taken advantage of the prolonged conflict in Aceh by making money from arms and drug trades, and they will do whatever they can do to perpetuate the conflict in the province for their own gain.

Additionally, the huge amount of money earmarked for Aceh's reconstruction has also created problems as many parties want to get their hands on at least part of the "tsunami cake". The international community will not tolerate any misuse of the donations destined for the tsunami victims.

A good beginning: Yudhoyono

Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono here on Monday expressed his happiness on the signing of the peace pact and called for rebuilding Aceh.

Key points in Aceh peace accord

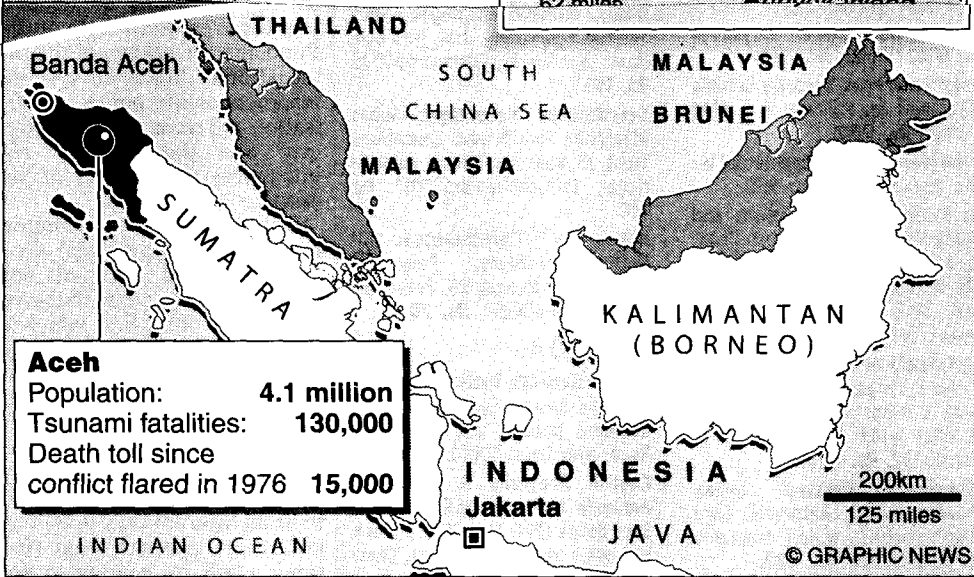
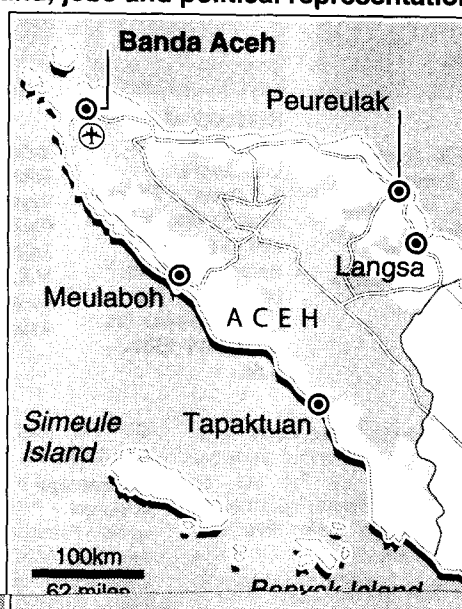
The peace deal struck between Indonesia and separatist rebels of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) is aimed at ending one of Asia's longest insurgencies. Under the accord GAM will renounce demands for full independence in return for amnesty, land, jobs and political representation

● **Politics:** Aceh state to integrate into Indonesia. Jakarta to allow local political parties to contest top Aceh positions from April 2006

● **Economy:** Aceh will have power to arrange local tax policies and seek foreign loans and investment - under rules of central bank

● **Natural resources:** Aceh to receive 70% of revenues from its oil and gas reserves from 2009 - up from current 55% of oil and 40% of gas revenues

● **Security:** GAM will surrender all arms to Aceh Monitoring Mission by December 31. Number of Indonesian troops in Aceh to be cut from 35,000 to 13,000, and police from 15,000 to 10,000



"On the behalf of the Indonesian government and the Indonesian people, I have to thank to the great achievement," Mr. Yudhoyono said during a video conference with Helsinki at his presidential office. He said that the reaching of the agreement

was a good beginning to build Aceh province, which has experienced three-decade-long armed conflict that claimed over 15,000 lives.

"It is a good beginning, it is a new beginning, because what we would like to do is to see the

MoU to be well implemented in the field. And we will do our best in succeeding this Memorandum of Understanding," he said.

The President also expressed his gratitude to the Government of Finland for its support in the achievement. - Xinhua

Coming full circle

It's funny having to reflect upon what took place in this particular month 13 years ago, now that another potentially massive graft scandal may be unfolding before us. The only consolation is perhaps the fact that democracy everywhere must endure a long, winding and bumpy road.

In May 1992, Thais put waywardly ambitious military chiefs in their place,

but the ideology that inspired that uprising has ever since been struggling to maintain its presence in the national psyche.

The National Peace-keeping Council (NPKC) was becoming an empire, and we were angry about it. When its leader, General Suchinda Kraprayoon, broke his pledge to honour election results and allow a government to be formed in a normal manner and instead taking over as Prime Minister, an angry Thai middle class erupted.

The NPKC had already let the country down over an unfulfilled promise to stamp out corruption after staging a coup in 1991 against the democratically elected Chatichai administration.

State propaganda was in full swing and media freedom under threat.

The "Black May" triumph yielded a new Constitution and ushered in a new era, one in which annual military reshuffles no longer make headlines. Another benefit has been people like former supreme commander Surayud Chulanont ironically becoming the embodiment of democratic ideals.

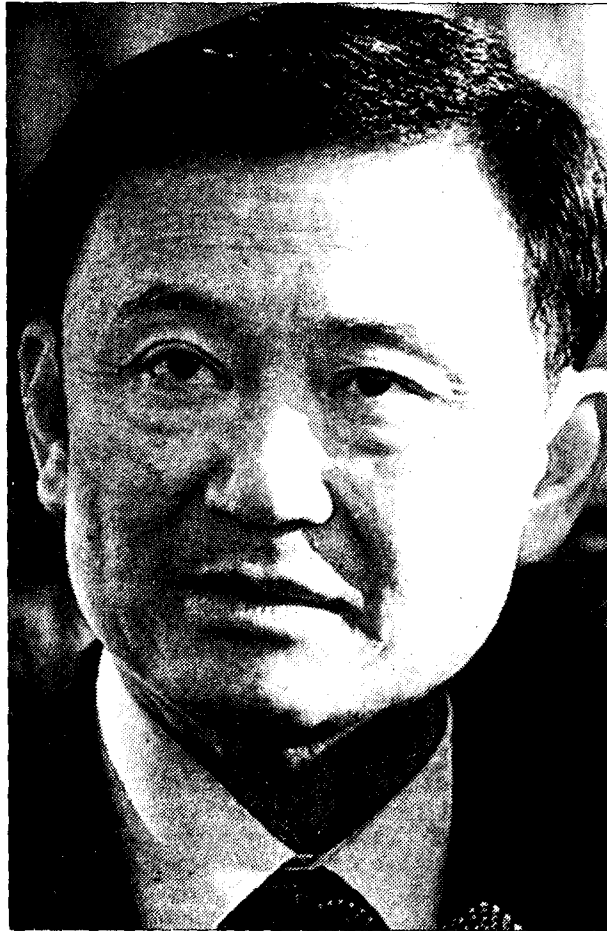
It was nice to see corruption-prone or ineffective governments collapse under the weight of their own sins.

And how wonderful the People's Charter was.

The Green Flag campaign overcame resistance by the status quo in Parliament and forced them to accept the constitutional draft in 1997, a major victory for reformists.

We counted the days

Thirty years after the people said an emphatic 'No!' to military involvement in politics in Thailand, the country has regressed to a point where power-hungry officers are easing themselves into positions of authority, writes
TULSATHIT TAPTIM



Thai Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra: Lambasts the media daily.

before the first senatorial election and couldn't wait for the new anti-graft mechanisms to wreak havoc on the bad guys and install transparency and

good governance.

Then Thaksin Shinawatra happened.

Mr Thaksin came to challenge Thais' clamouring for reform, defy the legitimacy of the Green Flag spirit and probably expose the nation's true identity.

In the space of four years, the fight for political transparency and civil liberty has become, once again, a back-to-the-wall job.

And Mr Thaksin's great escape from the share-concealment scandal was not as significant as the empathy or even cheers that greeted it.

All of a sudden, the belief that we need a good system to have good politicians was shattered by the ancient doctrine that a leader's survival and that of the country were inseparable.

His daily lambasting of newspapers has not been as important as the meek response of society.

That his business empire was allowed to swallow up an independent television station born out of the need to fight state propaganda in the wake of Black May should have served as a major warning that maybe Thais value media freedom only when they think it matters.

The Tak Bai incident is not as telling about our nation as is the little sympathy shown by the public for the people who died at the hands of government troops. The first elected Senate has flunked the test, with just a few exceptions of young blood.

Adding insult to injury, there have been efforts to amend the charter to allow incumbent Senators to

stand for re-election, coinciding with rumours that the ruling Thai Rak Thai is planning to expand its domination of politics to the Upper House.

Just like the National Counter Corruption Commission, the Constitution Court and the Election Commission before it, the Senate now stands a good chance of changing from a supposedly independent institution for checks and balances into a tamed body that would never cross the powers-that-be.

Nothing is as damning as our political system's pathetic response to the Suvarnabhumi Airport bribery scandal.

The government is blaming the media for "ruining" the country's reputation.

Anti-corruption authorities, the Anti-money Laundering Office to be exact, have accused newspapers of "fantasising" while that agency should have been launching an investigation instead. Worse still, this kind of reaction has become the norm.

Every graft scandal involving the Thaksin administration has become some kind of taboo, with accusers risking being labelled a seditious element.

Thirty years after voicing an emphatic "No!" to military involvement in politics, we have returned to the stage where power-hungry armed forces officers find easy excuses to let themselves in. It's tempting to be quite pessimistic.

But trying to look on the bright side, it's not the first time democracy has run into a blind alley. It can always find its way out, mostly with the help of its enemies.

The author is Managing Editor, *The Nation/ANN*

The move to renew age-old historical and cultural ties between India's troubled North-east and Asean countries will not only boost trade, commerce and tourism prospects in the region but will also pave the way for a more open and free society and greater democratisation of the political process.

Political boundaries, forced on the people by history, have separated and isolated the region's peoples who have historical, cultural, racial and ethnic affinities and share similar socio-economic, environmental and climatic conditions. India and Thailand's "Look East-Look West" policy — aimed at greater economic cooperation and people-to-people interactions — can bridge the gap left by history. But there's a problem child in the region — Myanmar. The junta in Yangon is also holding talks with many rebel outfits and ethnic groups such as the Karen National Union (KNU), the political wing of the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA). While there is a note of optimism to these developments yet talks could also fail, making the political future in the region and bilateral relations between India and the Asean countries uncertain.

In his first interview after 56 years as a jungle fighter, KNLA supremo, "lieutenant-general" Mutu Saepoe (72), vowed to carry on the fight for autonomy for an ethnic Karen state in Myanmar. "We have fought them for 56 years. The end is not coming, not yet," he said, while warning the junta, "If the dictators want to fight, we are ready to fight. If they want to compromise, we are going to compromise." This warning was made on 31 January at a military camp of the KNLA, based opposite Tha Yong Sang in Tak Province of north-western Thailand bordering Myanmar.

KNU secretary-general, Pado Mahn Shah, is equally adamant: "The KNU wants the Myanmar government to use peaceful means to handle every national issue. If the government is sincere, all political prisoners should be released and it should negotiate with all military groups and stop using violence."

The KNU, perhaps the largest ethnic minority rebel outfit still defying Yangon's dictatorial military regime, is presently holding talks with Yangon Generals with representatives of other ethnic groups and Opposition parties for establishment of a more democratic set-up in Myanmar. Leading these talks on behalf of KNU is "general" Bo Mya (77), who has been fighting Yangon for 40 years.

The Karen tribesmen, who zealously succeeded in safeguarding their independent way of life for centuries, view the Myanmar government as their traditional enemy. "General" Mya's historic statement made during his struggle still continue to guide the political thinking of ethnic movement in the region: "Our people helped the British fight for their freedom in two world wars, but now that we are fighting for our freedom they have forgotten us. We have been fighting ever since they handed us over to the Myanmar government." After the junta-initiated ceasefire talks with rebel groups in January last year, KNU has held talks with the junta in Yangon.

Informal talks were supposed to have been held in March. But after the removal of Lt-Gen Khin Nyunt, former Myanmar Prime Minister, from office in October, negotiations with the Myanmar government has been at a

Patience at stake



NLD leader Aung San Suu Kyi: Resolute.

Pressure has to be put on the junta to be more flexible in its approach towards forming a just, free and democratic political system in Myanmar, writes JIGME N KAZI



A Karen guerrilla. — PTI

standstill. The political situation in Myanmar deteriorated after the recent extension of Aung San Suu Kyi's detention by one year and arrest of anti-junta leaders.

To put more pressure on the junta to be more flexible in its approach towards forming a more just, free and democratic political system in Myanmar, exiled Myanmar politicians and human rights activists recently urged the South-east Asian nations and the international community to force the junta to include a multi-party democratic system in the draft constitution. The call was given in Bangkok on the eve of the junta-sponsored National Convention which met in Yangon on 17 February to draft a new constitution.

The eight principles proposed by 106 Myanmar activists from 40 dissident organisations for a new constitution include sovereign power, self-determination, federal principles, minority rights, democratic human rights, equality and secularism. "We aren't separatists. All ethnic groups fighting with the central government are demanding dialogue, not guns. We are united. We will form a union based on equality, self-determination and freedom," said Liang Sakhong, secretary-general of the United Nationalities League for Democracy (UNLD), at a press conference in Bangkok on 14 February.

One of the signatories to the eight-point proposal is the National Council of the Union of Burma (NCUB), an umbrella organisation comprising Opposition political parties, ethnic and armed groups in exile. NCUB general secretary, U Maung Maung, said he was disappointed with the previous role of the UN and Asean in dealing with the junta. He also said, "We don't expect anything from the National Convention." Mr Sakhong said the eight basic principles were sent to members of the National League for Democracy, political parties and ethnic groups inside Myanmar.

As a mark of protest and non-cooperation, the NLD and Shan Nationalities League for Democracy (SNLD) boycotted the convention. The junta claimed that more than 1,000

delegates, including 29 from political parties and 633 from minority groups and 17 rebel groups which had signed the ceasefire agreement, were invited to participate in the drafting of the constitution.

The NLD boycotted the convention in protest against the continued house arrest of Mrs Suu Kyi and party vice-president, Tin Oo (78). Just before the convention, the junta extended Mr Oo's house arrest by a year and arrested seven leaders of the Shan ethnic groups. The military regime is expected to hold a referendum early next year on the new constitution currently being drafted.

The Shan leaders' arrest followed the holding of meetings by Shan leaders to discuss the state's future. These meetings took place just before Union Day, celebrated annually in honour of the Panlong Agreement. Myint Thein, senior adviser to the Myanmar resistance, said, "To induce the Sawbwas (princes of Shan State) to join the newly independent Union of Burma, General Aung San (father of NLD leader Suu Kyi) signed the Panlong Agreement on 12 February, 1947. This granted the Shan State the right of secession 10 years after the union's formation."

Mr Thein explains: "So when Gen Ne Win staged a coup in 1962, he alleged it was because the Shan leaders had held a meeting to discuss the 'secession' clause. The coup marked the beginning of over 40 years of military rule in Burma." Mr Thein says that the junta supremo, Senior-General Than Shwe, "is paranoid that the Shan might exercise its rights under the Panlong Agreement and try to secede. He fears that the USA would then recognise the Shan state and use it as a staging area to topple Burma's military government."

The USA and the European Union, while calling for the release of all political prisoners, including Mrs Suu Kyi, also urged the junta to begin substantive dialogue with Opposition parties and ethnic minorities.

The Nobel Laureate was first placed under house arrest in 1989. She was released in July 1995 but detained

again in 2000. After her release in May 2002, Mrs Suu Kyi was again re-arrested in 2003 when her motorcade was attacked by a pro-junta mob. In November 2004, the junta extended her detention by a year. Mrs Suu Kyi and Mr Tin Oo are being held under the State Protection Law, 1975, which can be extended up to five years. The NLD won a landslide victory in the 1990 general elections in Myanmar but was never allowed to assume power.

The USA rejected the manner in which the junta was going ahead with its self-proclaimed "road map" to democracy, the first step of which is the drafting of a constitution followed by a referendum and "free and fair" elections. In a statement, the US state department spokesman, Richard Boucher, said, "Without the full participation of the democratic Opposition and ethnic minority groups, the National Convention lacks the legitimacy necessary to draft a constitution that is truly democratic and representative of the Burmese."

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan was quick to react against the non-participation of the NLD in the National Convention. Mr Annan warned that the international community would reject Myanmar's referendum on a constitution if the main Opposition party, the NLD, is not involved in the process.

"Unless this poll adheres to internationally acceptable standards of conduct and participation, it may be difficult for the international community, including countries of the region, to endorse the result," he said. As speculated by many political observers in the region, 2005 may well be a "make-or-break" year for the military regime in Yangon even as it forges ahead to host the next Asean Tourism Forum in Yangon early next year and takes over the chairmanship of the Asean during the Asean leaders' summit in November, 2006.

Even as Opposition parties and ethnic groups in Myanmar maintain a close watch on Yangon there are strong rumours that the junta is heading for a major split. There is a possibility that the power struggle between Yangon's

Generals may lead to a situation favourable for pro-democracy forces to make their presence felt in Myanmar politics.

External and internal pressure is increasingly building up on Yangon. When asked whether it would be appropriate for Myanmar to host the Asean summit next year, Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi said during his three-day visit to Pakistan in February that the junta need to do more than talk about their plans for a return to democracy and show "visible movement" to reassure fellow Asean governments.

"We have to continue to impress on the government that at the end of the day, for all their talking, telling us what they want to do...some visible movement towards the objective will have to be made," Mr Badawi said.

During a recent conference in New Delhi on "Indo-Myanmar Relations: Strengthening Civil Society Initiatives", Congress leader Anil Shastri said India would continue to support the pro-democracy movement led by Mrs Suu Kyi. He emphasised the need to keep the issue alive and create greater awareness of the socio-political situation in Myanmar.

Former Malaysian Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar Ibrahim, while expressing concern over the junta's recent decision to extend Mrs Suu Kyi's house arrest, criticised countries in the region for paying only "lip service to democracy while their policies ensure an increasingly uneven political playing field."

In an article published in a Bangkok daily recently, the Malaysian leader, who was dismissed from his post in 1998, said, while "civil society activists are forging ties across boundaries to press for democracy and human rights", governments of Asean countries "cling stubbornly to their outmoded doctrine of non-intervention in the domestic affairs of member-states".

Mr Ibrahim said that while Asean members such as Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines "have made giant steps towards a mature democracy...they have not made serious efforts to influence their less democratic partners, or to put democracy on the Asean agenda." He appealed to Asean leaders to "wake up to the reality that democracy is, more and more, asserting its presence in the region". After his return from Yangon on 9 December, 2004, where he had gone to attend a Buddhist summit, Thai Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, in his weekly Thai radio address, said he found Yangon's continued detention of Mrs Suu Kyi as "reasonable enough and convincing". He seemed to agree with the junta's perception that "there was always political violence and turmoil after the two or three previous releases of Mrs Suu Kyi." If the Myanmar people are not allowed to shape their own destiny, there is bound to be violence irrespective of whether Mrs Suu Kyi and other leaders are released or kept in perpetual detention.

Patience is running out in Myanmar and a political tsunami is bound to hit the country sooner or later. Rebel leaders in India and Myanmar are ready and willing to negotiate with their respective governments but they are also ready to draw their guns and carry on their fight to a bitter end if an honourable solution is not reached at the earliest.

(The author, formerly The Statesman's Gantok correspondent, is editor/proprietor of the Sikkim Observer.)

Blasts revive concern over Myanmar situation

Near-simultaneous explosions in Yangon on May 7

P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE: The security situation in Myanmar, not just its progress card on the restoration of internal democracy, may determine its first-ever bid to chair the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) in 2006.

This view is voiced, behind the scenes, within the wider Asia-Pacific diplomatic circuit.

The new concern is related to the three near simultaneous bomb explosions in Yangon, on May 7 which claimed the lives of at least 11 persons and injured over 150 others, occurred on a day when the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) renewed its expectations that Myanmar's military rulers would take steps for "the development of the democratisation process at

the earliest possible time."

At the least, the call, made by the Foreign Ministers or their representatives from 38 countries in the ASEM grouping, amounted to an appeal for the release of political prisoners in Myanmar, including Aung San Suu Kyi, the celebrated democracy campaigner.

Suu Kyi not blamed

The State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), Myanmar's junta, said terrorists were behind the bomb explosions. Significantly, it did not blame Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy.

One of the explosions occurred at a "trade fair" organised by a Thai business group, and Thailand, a fellow-member of the ASEAN, immediately raised

its security alert along the border with Myanmar.

For the SPDC, this was an unusual alert that arose out of perceptions about the security situation in Myanmar's capital itself.

Now, regardless of how long the Thai alert lasted and despite the fact that several ASEAN countries have been prone to terrorist threats, Myanmar finds itself with a new issue on its hands, in addition to the question of internal democracy, diplomatic observers emphasise.

At a recent meeting of ASEAN Foreign Ministers, attended by Myanmar, the group asked Yangon to decide soon whether it would press its case for chairmanship in 2006.

17 MAY 2005

THE HINDU

TWIN EXPLOSIONS KILL 22, WOUND 40 IN SULAWESI

Blasts in Indonesia

Associated Press

JAKARTA, May 28. — Two bombs exploded today at a busy market in central Indonesia, killing at least 22 people and wounding 40, but the government said the attacks were not related to years of sectarian violence in the area.

The blasts occurred in the morning at a market in Sulawesi island's Christian-dominated town of Tentena, a senior police officer said. Two policemen were among the wounded.

"The latest report says

Pak moves to identify bomber

ISLAMABAD, May 28. — Police today were trying to identify the remains of a suspected suicide bomber who attacked a popular Muslim shrine near the official residence of Pakistan's Prime Minister, killing at least 20 people yesterday. Police recovered the head of a man who appeared to be in his 20s and is believed to be the suicide attacker, said information minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed. He offered a reward of Rs 500,000 rupees for information that helps identify the attacker. Newspapers here today published photographs of the suspect's head — with an unshaven face, thin mustache and curly hair. **AP**

22 people were killed," Vice-President Mr. Jusuf Kalla told reporters in Makassar, the provincial capital of South Sulawesi. Mr Kalla said he believed the explosion was carried out by terrorists —

but that the attacks were not linked to long-running sectarian violence in the area. "The motive was to disturb the security situation in Poso," he added. Tentena is about 60 km from Poso, where fighting between Muslims and Christians claimed at least 1,000 lives in 2000-2002.

Those clashes were an offshoot of a larger Muslim-Christian conflict in the nearby Maluku archipelago, fomented by Lashkar Jihad, a militia from Indonesia's main island of Java.

29 MAY 2005

THE STATESMAN

US missions in Indonesia closed down

Jakarta, May 26

THE US closed all its diplomatic missions in Indonesia on Thursday because of a security threat as police warned that Islamic militants linked to al-Qaida were planning an attack on an unspecified target.

Police said they had strengthened protection at several other major embassies after the US closed its four missions in Indonesia until further notice. National police chief General Da'i Bachtiar said intelligence reports had pointed to another strike.

"The analysis of intelligence shows that preparations are being made for another attack ... but the target is still uncertain. There has been communication among them to conduct an attack," Bachtiar told reporters.

He was responding to questions about fugitive Malaysian Azahari bin Husin, one of the accused in a spate of bombings in Indonesia and a key member of Jemaah Islamiah, a group seen as the regional arm of al-Qaida.

Reuters

27 MAY 2005 THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Cloud on Rouge trial

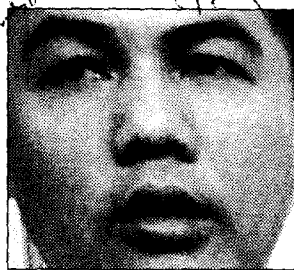
JEHANGIR S. POCHA

Phnom Penh, May 26: A long overdue trial of Cambodia's murderous Khmer Rouge leaders is finally expected to commence this year, but critics say interference from China is whittling away the tribunal's power and credibility.

Even though the trial focuses on people and not nations "it is certain to raise questions and reveal controversial things that will generate a lot of debate for China," said Youk Chhang, director of the Document Centre of Cambodia (DCCAM) in Phnom Penh where much of the evidence relating to the Khmer Rouge's atrocities is housed.

Beijing had been the chief patron of Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge when it seized power in Cambodia between 1975-78 and exterminated more than 1.7 million people, a quarter of the country's population, in its quest to create an agrarian Maoist utopia.

The US, Britain and Singapore also aided the Khmer Rouge in later years, and have come clean about their support for the world's worst



**Director of the Document Centre of Cambodia
Youk Chhang**

regime of the post-war period.

But China, along with Thailand, has refused to do the same and continues to cloak the role it played in Cambodia's nightmare.

"Without China, the Khmer Rouge might never have become what it did," said Dr Sophie Richardson, who recently completed a dissertation at the University of Virginia, on Chinese-Cambodian relations.

To remove the trial's credibility the impending trial, Beijing used its influence at the UN, which was originally to spearhead the effort, to reduce the role of international judges and give control of the tribunal to local Cambo-

dian authorities.

Few countries, including India which had been one of the most vocal critics of Chinese and western involvement in Cambodia during the 1970s and 1980s, opposed Beijing.

It was left to international human rights organisations, such as Amnesty International to decry Beijing's moves. Just 12 years after an ambitious \$2.8 billion UN peace-keeping operation meant to help Cambodia get back on its feet ended in November 1993, the country's legal and political system is not up to the task of leading the tribunal, they warned.

It is also widely believed that Cambodia's current strongman Hun Sen has already "cut a deal with Beijing" to sanitise its Khmer Rouge record, Richardson said.

Hun Sen is out of favour with Washington because of his increasing authoritarianism, and experts say he is reliant on Beijing's for political support.

Significantly, China has also become Cambodia's largest investor, investing \$217 million in several Cambodian industries.

27 MAY 2005

THE TELEGRAPH

Vietnam PM sets growth agenda

P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE: Presiding over the celebrations of the 30th anniversary of Vietnam's total reunification, Prime Minister Phan Van Khai has praised the "collective strength of the people and the armed forces" of the country.

Speaking at a function in Hanoi on Friday, on the eve of nationwide celebrations over the historic fall of Saigon (now, Ho Chi Minh city) and the defeat of United States exactly three decades ago Mr. Khai said the ruling Communist Party of Vietnam as also the State institutions and the people themselves reposed faith in the country's younger generation.

Noting that 60 per cent of Vietnam's population was born after the liberation of the southern part and its complete unification with the rest of the country on April 30, 1975, he said the younger gen-

eration must now shoulder the development-task.

Recounting how the State policy of 'Doi Moi' or 'renewal' over the last two decades had produced reform-oriented results during the last 20 years, the Prime Minister said economic productivity and creativity had been witnessed. "An improvement in infrastructure and an increase in wealthy households and a reduction in poverty" were achieved. It was in this context that the party and the State institutions were zeroing in their laser-beam focus on those born after the country's reunification.

Mr. Khai indicated a development agenda for the country as a whole in the present context of not only globalisation but also Vietnam's "rapid economic growth" since the adoption of 'Doi Moi' policy and the country's vibrant links with others on the international stage.

01 MAY 2005

THE HINDU

30 years since the war ended, Vietnam focusses on future

S. B. Asia Vietnam

110-1

1/5

Economic rejuvenation is the key word; hundreds of war veterans join celebrations



LEGEND: General Vo Nguyen Giap, 94, salutes as he arrives at the official celebration in Ho Chi Minh City of the 30th anniversary of Vietnam's Liberation. The master strategist of the rout of the French in Dienbienphu (1954) and of the final victory over the United States (April 30, 1975) in the Vietnam War is the bridge between past and present. General Giap identifies the present challenge as winning the "war over poverty and backwardness." - PHOTO: AFP

HO CHI MINH CITY, APRIL 30. Marching troops paraded down the same route taken by North Vietnamese tanks when they rolled into the city 30 years ago, as Vietnam on Saturday celebrated the communist victory over a government backed by the United States.

Watched by the country's top leaders and legendary figures such as war hero Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap, soldiers, government workers and performers marched with red flags waving toward the palace gates. Hundreds of ageing veterans, their chests decked with medals, watched from the sidelines.

Giant billboards of Ho Chi Minh, Vietnam's revolutionary leader, dominated the parade ground and adjoining streets, which had been blocked off to the public for security concerns.

The atmosphere in the country three decades later has been mostly festive, focusing on Vietnam's recent economic rejuvenation. Memories of the war and its aftermath are little more than anecdotes in history books for most Vietnamese who were born after it ended.

"My father and grandfather fought in the war but I was too young. I think my future will be good because they created opportunities for my generation," said Nguyen Thanh Tung, an 18-year-old student.

On April 30, 1975, Communist tanks barrelled through the gates of the Presidential Palace, the heart of the U.S.-backed Saigon Government. The fall of Saigon marked the official end to the Vietnam War, and America's more than decade-long attempt to halt the spread of communism in the region. The war claimed some 58,000 American lives and an estimated 3 million Vietnamese. - AP

More reports on Pages 13, 18

Jail for cleric in Bali blast

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, MARCH 3. A high-profile Muslim cleric of Indonesia, Abu Bakar Baasyir (Bashir), was today sentenced by the South Jakarta District Court to two years and six months in prison for his role in "a sinister conspiracy" that led to the terrorist carnage in Bali in October 2002.

The death toll was nearly 200, with Australian holiday-makers being the largest single group of victims.

The Chairman of the Panel of Judges, Sudarto, acquitted Mr. Baasyir of all other charges of

inciting or planning terrorist attacks across Indonesia, including the bombing of a luxury hotel in Jakarta in August 2003.

Rejects verdict

Mr. Baasyir, leader of Jemaah Islamiyah, which is widely regarded as the southeast Asian affiliate of the Al-Qaeda, rejected the court's verdict and blamed the U.S. for the manner in which he was being treated. There was no immediate indication about the future course of this case.

Mr. Baasyir, who was arrested in 2002 in the wake of the Bali

bombings, was acquitted of the charges of treason and sentenced, a year later, for immigration offences. He was charged afresh on the basis of claims about new evidence.

With the case having attracted much international attention, regional diplomats and observers took the general line that no rigorous sentence was expected in the light of a recent judicial ruling that Indonesia's stern anti-terror laws, passed after the Bali bombings, could not be applied to any "conspiracy" that might have triggered that tragedy.

Fossett sails ahead despite setback

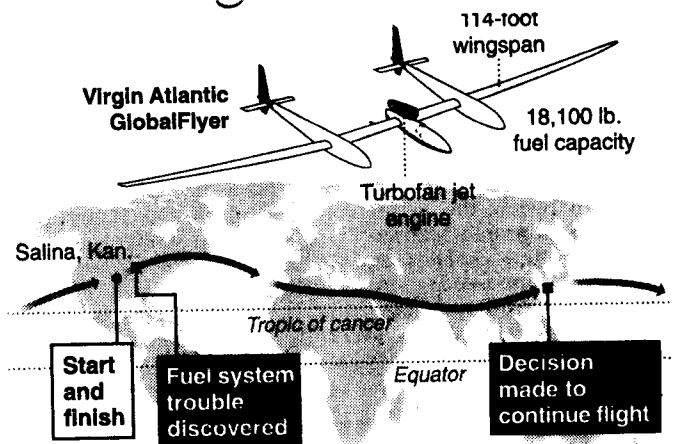
CHICAGO, MARCH 3. Adventurer Steve Fossett decided to try to complete his bid to make the first non-stop solo airplane flight around the world without refuelling despite a fuel shortage, his team said today.

Mr. Fossett was past Hawaii at 1030 IST, pushed eastward towards the U.S. by stronger-than-expected tail winds.

The pilot also had altered course slightly hoping for a landing early Thursday afternoon in Kansas at the airfield from which he took off on Monday night, a spokeswoman said.

"Go for it," the ground team quoted the 60-year-old millionaire former markets trader as saying after he had completed more than 80 per cent of the globe-circling flight in an experimental plane powered by a single jet engine.

There had been speculation that he would be forced to land in Hawaii because of an unexplained loss of fuel early in the flight; but his control centre in Salina, Kansas, said they hoped



NOTE: Approximate route shown

SOURCE: Virgin Atlantic GlobalFlyer

he would be able to complete the circuit as planned.

Project director Paul Moore said more fuel was either consumed or somehow leaked during the early stages of the flight than was realised, leaving Mr. Fossett with barely enough to get across the Pacific.

Once past Hawaii, Mr. Fossett had 4,200 km before the

next available airstrip, on Catalina Island off California's coast.

The plane can land on any size landing strip, his control centre said.

Mr. Fossett, the first to make a solo balloon trip around the world non-stop, hoped to make the 37,000-km trip in a little less than three days. — Reuters

Filipino police storm prison to end hostage crisis

By P. S. Suryanarayana

SINGAPORE, MARCH 15. The Special Action Force of the Philippine National Police today stormed a high security prison in Manila to quell an uprising by some inmates, said to be linked to the Abu Sayyaf group of terrorists, and rescued a number of their fellow-prisoners, who were being held hostage during a stand-off with the authorities that lasted over 24 hours.

At least 20 persons, including probably three prison guards at the Camp Bagong Diwa detention facility, were reported killed, either during the operation by the security forces or at the time of the aborted jail break that triggered the crisis on Monday.

Some observers said almost all the prisoners who died belonged to the Abu Sayyaf Group which, according to the intelligence community in the region, has links to Jemaah Islamiyah, suspected affiliate of the Al-Qaeda in southeast Asia.

Pat for police

The Filipino President, Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, praising the Crisis Management Committee, headed by the Interior and Local Governments Secretary, Angelito Reyes, for the successful operation, said terrorism would not win in the Philippines.

She said the decision to

storm the prison was taken only after efforts at negotiating an end to the crisis failed and the "terrorists" refused to surrender.

The crisis began with the killing of prison guards by some "Abu Sayyaf inmates" as they attempted a jail-break, which was then thwarted by other guards, according to the authorities.

Later, taking the fellow-inmates hostage, the "terrorists" raised various demands including a quick trial or immediate release.

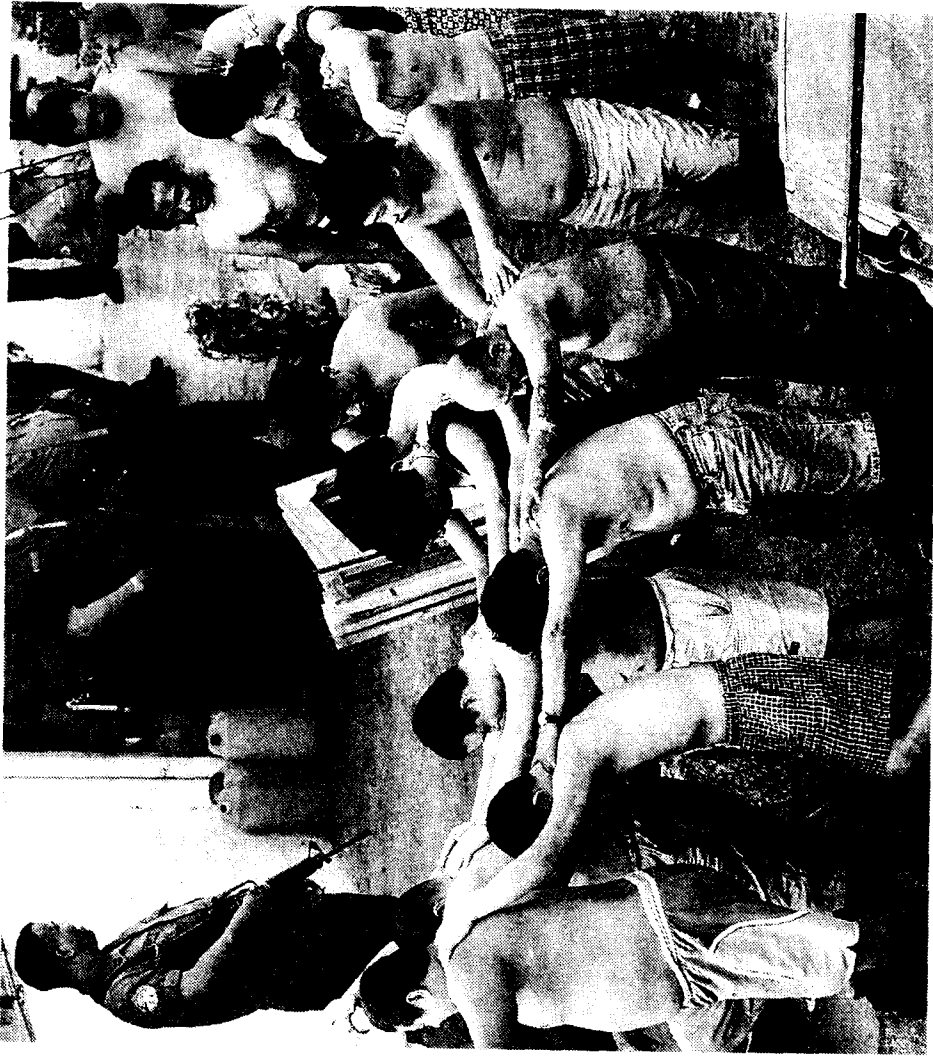
Terrorist acts have become frequent in the Philippines, especially in the southern provinces, where separatist rebels and ransom-seeking groups have been operating for several years now.

The military and other security agencies have been mandated to wipe out terrorism, and Manila has also received help from the U.S. in this regard.

Reuters reports:

The Manila police chief, Avelino Razon, said they had received intelligence reports as early as last December that Abu Sayyaf suspects might be planning a jail break and were smuggling in parts of weapons, mobile phones and explosives.

"We took some pre-emptive measures, but, apparently, there were lapses on the part of jail officials," he said.



END OF THE SIEGE: Detenus form a human chain after police stormed Camp Bagong Diwa in Manila on Tuesday. — Reuters

Indonesia quake toll may top 1,000

Reuters
Gunungstoli (Indonesia),
March 29

MORE THAN 1,000 people were feared killed in a massive earthquake that hit a remote Indonesian island famed as a surfing paradise, reducing large parts of its main town to rubble.

The Indian Ocean epicentre of Monday night's 8.7-magnitude quake was just about 160 km southeast of the upheaval three months ago which triggered a tsunami that left 300,000 people dead or missing across Asia.

Indonesia's disaster centre said 1,000 people were killed in the latest tremor, which was about two to four times less powerful than the 9.0-magnitude quake on December 26 but was still one of the eight biggest in the world since 1900. Indonesia's Vice-President said the toll could reach 2,000.

The quake struck near Nias island off Sumatra and devastated the main town, Gunungstoli. The airstrip was damaged and the first relief plane managed to land only late on Tuesday. "The quake was really powerful," said 30-year-old carpenter Yulianus Zebua. "The earth was shaking, so we walked like drunkards. People walked, used motorcycles and cars to flee to the hills."

Many of the buildings in the town of 30,000 people were reduced to rubble. Bodies were being collected at a town mosque and relief workers were treating the injured on a soccer field. Injured children wept and most residents prepared to sleep outdoors, their homes either ruined or too dangerous to live in. There was no electricity or water.

Relief workers from international aid group Oxfam said roads in the town had collapsed. "Bodies are being pulled from the rubble as I speak," said Alessandra Villas-Boas, a member of Oxfam's assessment team. "The water system has failed completely and huge holes have been made in the roads." In the Sumatran city of Medan, Erni Ginting, a spokeswoman for the disaster centre for Aceh and North Sumatra, said, "We figure there are now 1,000 people dead on Nias."

Nias is a rugged and remote island about 1,400 km northwest of Jakarta with a population of around 700,000. Its beaches are regarded as a surfing paradise for a

fabled right-hand break, a regular wave that courses at an angle from left to right.

Another relief official said at least 15 people were dead and dozens injured on the island of Simeulue, north of Nias, one of the first reports of deaths at other locales in Sumatra.

The quake, which hit shortly before or just after midnight across Asia, spread terror in western Indonesia, Sri Lanka and coastal parts of India, Malaysia and Thailand, the areas devastated by the December tsunami.

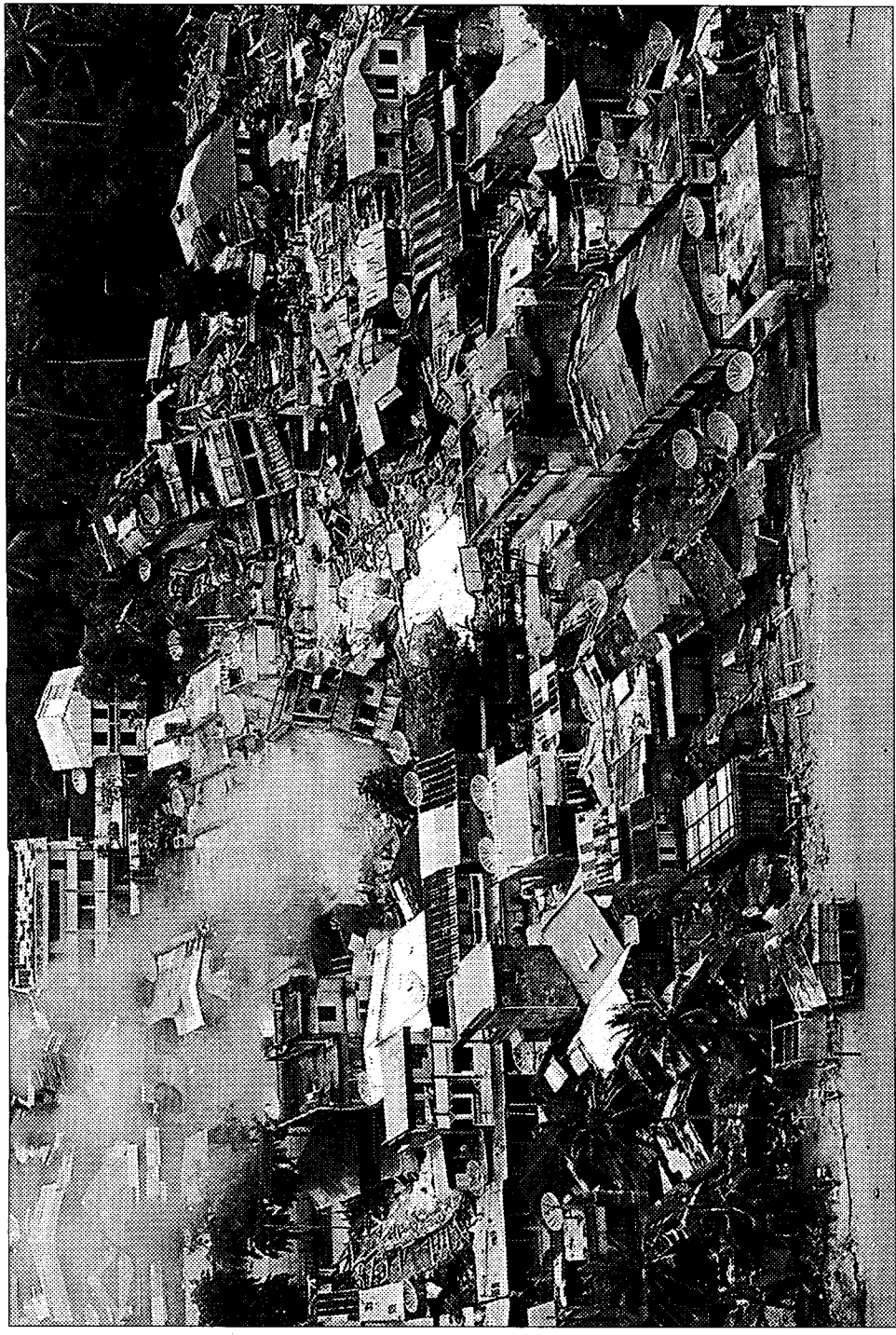
Despite the late hour, the countries largely coped well, although there was considerable panic. In contrast to three months ago, when Asian nations were not even part of a warning network, the risk was immediately relayed by the Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre in Hawaii and distributed across the region.

Police, soldiers, monks, fishermen and residents of coastal areas across the Indian Ocean used megaphones, radio, telephones and temple bells to warn of the possibility of another tsunami. Authorities on the Indian Ocean island of Mauritius, put on alert after reports that a tsunami could be headed their way, called off shoreline patrols before dawn.

Small tsunami

This quake did trigger a tsunami, but it was a small one and headed south into the middle of the Indian Ocean. "The orientation of the fault directed the maximum height of the tsunami into the middle of the Indian Ocean rather than towards Sri Lanka and India," Gary Gibson at the Seismology Research Centre in Melbourne, Australia, said. "So in that direction, we didn't have a problem. Toward the Sumatran coast, the sea is quite shallow and so it's probable that quite a lot of the energy from the tsunami was dissipated before it reached the coast."

In Banda Aceh, the province on the mainland hardest hit by last year's tsunami, panic-stricken residents rushed into the streets after Monday's quake. "We went down to the street and people began to panic. Some people screamed 'Water! Water! The water is coming again,'" said Yudisia Arafah, a 23-year-old government worker in Aceh.



An aerial view of the quake-hit portion of Nias island, Indonesia on Tuesday.

AFP

December shock triggered disaster

Reuters
Sydney, March 29

A HUGE undersea earthquake that killed hundreds in Indonesia overnight was a result of increased geological stress caused by last December's mega-quake that sent a devastating tsunami across southern Asia, seismologists said. And they warned of a third big earthquake in the area sooner or later.

Monday's tremor was centred about 160 km southeast of the epicentre of the December quake off Sumatra's northern tip. Geoscience Australia said the earlier quake was two to four times larger.

Like the 2004 tremor, the latest one was a vertical earthquake where part of the ocean floor was thrust upwards by another tectonic plate pushing beneath it. "It appears to be the same plate boundary where the Australian plate is slipping beneath the Sumatran (Sunda) plate," Geoscience Australia seismologist Phil Cummins said.

Seismologists had been warning of a second earthquake off Sumatra due to the increased geological stress caused by last December's quake.

Cummins said a third earthquake was to be expected because geological stress levels

would rise further following the latest tremor. "There is a chance that the next segment further to the southeast could rupture sooner than we expected," he said. "But we can't predict the time. Rather than 100 years it might be 20 or 50 years," he said, but added it was possible it could be coming in the next three months.

Australia's remote Cocos Islands in the Indian Ocean recorded a tiny tsunami on Tuesday, with a 10-cm wave followed by a 25-cm wave. Cocos recorded a 33-cm wave after the December 26 quake.

Hawaii's Pacific Tsunami Warning Centre, which issued

and then cancelled a tsunami warning after Monday's quake, said early warning systems put in place since December had worked. "The international effort paid off. It all went smoothly," said the centre's Dave Burwell. He said the centre contacted a network of meteorological and geoscience offices in Asia who then alerted local communities to the tsunami warning.

The US Geological Survey report on the latest earthquake also said it was "likely triggered by stress changes caused by the December 2004 earthquake". Before that disaster, the previous quake of above magnitude 8 in this area occurred in 1861.

Special autonomy offered for Aceh

By P. S. Suryanarayana

APD
S. B. Yudhoyono
SINGAPORE, FEB. 15. The Indonesian President, Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, said in Singapore today the separatist rebels of Aceh province had been offered a "solution ... based on the special autonomy status."

Following his discussions with the Singapore Prime Minister, Lee Hsien Loong, on bilateral and regional issues, Mr. Yudhoyono told newsmen he was informed by the Indonesian delegation to the recent first round of "informal talks" with the Aceh rebels in Helsinki that "there is progress, even though it is not much."

Master plan *MS-15*

He said a "master plan" for the reconstruction of the tsunami-swept Aceh would be completed next month. The international community would be sounded out for possible

participation in the reconstruction effort.

Without going into the controversial question of the continued presence of some foreign troops including those of the U.S., Australia and Pakistan, in and around Aceh on "emergency relief work" nearly two months after the tsunami-strike, Mr. Yudhoyono said the plan would "maintain the uniqueness of Aceh as one of the Islamic centres with strong culture and traditions."

Extradition treaty *15/2*

Mr. Lee said Singapore was "committed to concluding an extradition treaty with Indonesia." Noting that "the issues are complicated," he said the two sides had agreed to negotiate "expeditiously" a "good and workable agreement."

Indonesia and Singapore will sign an investment guarantee agreement here on Wednesday.

A LANDMARK VICTORY IN THAILAND

WITH THE LANDSLIDE victory of Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's Thai Rak Thai party, electoral history has been rewritten in Thailand. Thai Rak Thai is projected to win nearly three-fourths of the 500 seats up for grabs in Parliament. It is not just that a single party majority was unknown in Thai politics. Until now no Prime Minister or coalition has been able to overcome the anti-incumbency factor and return to power. Mr. Shinawatra also becomes the first Prime Minister to complete a full, four-year term. After his coalition experience with the Chart Thai party last time, he will obviously be inclined to form his own government now. The ruling party has massively improved on its strength of 248 in the last House. It is expected to win upwards of 370 seats, making it impossible for the Opposition even to censure the Government or move a no-confidence motion. The main opposition Democrat party may end up with fewer than 100 seats, the bulk of them coming from the Muslim-dominated southern provinces.

Such an overwhelming mandate brings with it both advantages and drawbacks. For Thai politics and on the economic front, there are major implications. An element of stability in government has just been introduced in the polity, and foreign investors, among others, will find it congenial to deal with a strongly led regime. Given the notoriety of Thai coalition politics and the level of corruption among some of the parties, 'overheads' became a codeword among many investors who complained routinely about corruption levels in Thailand. All that can become unsavoury history if Mr. Shinawatra and his Thai Rak Thai party decide to provide a pro-people, clean, and development-friendly administration. It is interesting that the 55-year-old Premier, a product of the police academy, left for higher

studies in the U.S., and returned to launch his own business. After an initial stint in politics, he quit a coalition government in which he was one of the Deputy Prime Ministers. He came back to active politics half a decade ago, floating a party of his own. As head of the Shinawatra group, he had the resources as well as an effective network to launch his own organisation. While many politicians professed to detest this business-politics mix, the people obviously viewed it as a refreshing change. He was seen as a resourceful political leader who can easily change the face of politics in the country.

Mr. Shinawatra's political opponents accuse him, not without reason, of "arrogance and intolerance." His first innings was uneventful, for the most part. But the Thai economy has emerged from the spillover of the East Asian economic meltdown that was sparked by Thailand itself in 1997. Mr. Shinawatra is accused of trying to intimidate and manipulate the media, and was reportedly spoken to by the highly respected King Bhumibol Adulyatej — on the need for temperance and tolerance. His Government was not able to solve the problem of insurgency and unrest in the south, where the Muslim majority feels hard done by. With respect to administration and economic policy-making, the Prime Minister has been charged with nepotism and cronyism; he appointed his own cousin as the Army Commander and then sidelined him. It is up to Mr. Shinawatra to learn from the experiences of his first term and provide a better government this time. The brute majority he enjoys must not blind him to the democratic features of the 1997 Constitution, which was a product of the people's relentless struggle and the determination of a coalition to stabilise the democratic polity and institutions of the country.

THE HINDU 12 FEB 2005

Thaksin set to establish one-party Thai govt

The Nation/ANN

BANGKOK, Feb. 6. — Prime Minister Mr Thak-sin Shinawatra looked poised to establish an unprecedented one-party government in Thailand after voters — poor rural villagers and Bangkokians alike — handed his Thai Rak Thai a massive landslide victory in today's general election.

The resounding mandate has yet to be officially confirmed, as vote counting only began late last evening. But exit polls showed that Thai Rak Thai could win 340-399 House of Representatives seats, thanks largely to a major sweep of Bangkok, where voters apparently snubbed the Opposition Democrat Party's desperate, last-ditch plea for the preservation of parliamentary checks and balances.

Mr Thaksin confirmed that his party had won enough seats to allow his Thai Rak Thai party to rule alone, although he vowed to "consult" his bitter ally, Chat Thai Party leader Mr Banharn Silapa-archa, before making a final decision. Chat Thai's chances of remaining in the post-election government, however, will depend on



Mr Thaksin Shinawatra with his son Panthongthae Shinawatra and daughters Pinthongta Shinawatra (left) and Paetongtarn Shinawatra in Bangkok on Sunday. — PTI

parliamentary numbers, not its often stormy relations with the ruling party.

If Thai Rak Thai wins more than 350 seats, Mr Thaksin hinted it would probably go ahead and form a single-party administration.

Some voters cast their ballots next to pictures of missing tsunami victims, while others had military guards protecting them from southern insurgents. But Thais apparently

went to the polls with "continuity" and "decisiveness" in mind and put aside doubts about Thaksin's moral integrity.

Mr Thaksin added: "Thai Rak Thai won because we worked very hard and were dedicated these past four years. We achieved many of our goals, particularly in fighting poverty, and this won the hearts of the public."

07 FEB 2005

Thaksin "wins" second term

S. B. A. - Photo



BANGKOK, JAN. 6 The Thai Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, today declared he had won an unprecedented second term with what appeared to be a massive mandate in Sunday's general elections. He was propelled by strong support from the rural poor and his adroit handling of the tsunami disaster.

"Even though the numbers are clear that we've won, we still have to wait for the final count for the exact numbers," Mr. Thaksin said. "The numbers are more than enough to establish a one-party government." He said "to be polite" he would talk to his coalition partner, the Chart Thai party, about the shape of a new government.

Opponents of the strong-willed Prime Minister, who accuse him of seeking dictatorship through the ballot box, all but conceded defeat before the election but had hoped to net at least enough seats to launch motions of no-confidence.

Hopes dashed

Early exit polls showed their hopes had been dashed. One poll showed that Mr. Thaksin's ruling Thai Rak Thai, or Thai Love Thai, party may have captured as many as 399 out of the 500 parliamentary seats up for grabs. Another gave him 340 seats.

Unofficial results were not expected until late Sunday.

Mr. Thaksin said the results would "give the world confidence that Thailand does not have any political problems, so the next four years, they will look at our policies, and if they can trust our policies, then they can trust Thailand."

The leader of the main Oppo-

sition Democrat party, Banyat Bantadtan, appeared resigned to a defeat.

Corruption

"If it turns out that way (as the polls say), today we will have to congratulate Thai Rak Thai. They will have succeeded. They will have been able to establish a one-party government with a flood of votes," he said, inviting other Opposition parties to join him to act as a check

on the new government.

The Election Commission conceded over the weekend that the campaign had been riddled with corruption but said it was difficult to catch violators red-handed.

An earlier poll estimated that 10 billion baht (\$260 millions) had been doled out to buy votes.

Twenty parties fielded 2,289 candidates, but only four or five parties were expected to win

seats in the 500-member House of Representatives.

Thai Rak Thai, which Mr. Thaksin created, won 248 seats in its 2001 election debut, and had aimed to capture more than 350 this time.

Mr. Thaksin came under fire last year for alleged cronyism, inept handling of a bird flu outbreak and failure to curb sectarian violence in Thailand's Muslim-dominated south.

His intolerance of criticism

also raised concern.

But his reaction to the Dec. 26 tsunami was quick and effective, rushing to the scene with Ministers in tow, issuing orders and consoling survivors.

Debate about his failings was soon swept off the front pages.

Villagers in the devastated areas lined up to vote at polling booths, often within sight of where their homes once stood and now-dead family members lived. — AP

The Thai Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, answers questions from the media at his Thai Rak Thai Party headquarters in Bangkok on Sunday. — Reuters

Thaksin victory will lead to dictatorship, says Opposition

BANGKOK, FEB. 5. In last-minute pleas to voters, Thailand's enfeebled Opposition warned that the country will slide back into the era of dictators if the Prime Minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, scores a widely anticipated victory in Sunday's general election.

"The country will be in peril if voters give overwhelming power to one man without leaving any channels to scrutinise him," the leader of the Opposition Democrat Party, Banyat Bantadtan, told a rally as the election campaign wound down on Friday night.

Ebullient

Mr. Thaksin, who has become the country's first elected Prime Minister to complete a four-year term, looks set to attain another historic landmark, with his Thai Rak Thai party expected to be the first to win a majority of parliamentary seats in a free election. An ebullient

Mr. Thaksin, addressing tens of thousands of supporters in downtown Bangkok, dismissed fears that such a victory would endanger the country's hard-won democracy.

"Where in the world is a single-party government called a dictatorship? What's wrong with it when people have faith in me?" he said.

Twenty political parties have put up 2,289 candidates for the polls, but only four or five parties are expected to win seats in the 500-member House of Representatives.

The Thai Rak Thai, or Thai Love Thai, party, which won 248 seats in its 2001 election debut, is aiming to capture more than 350 this time around. So confident is Mr. Thaksin of a landslide, that he indicated on Friday that he would drop his top coalition partner, the Chart Thai Party, from the next Government.

The Democrat Party, Thai-

land's oldest, and other Opposition groups allege that Mr. Thaksin's main aim in seeking so many seats is to amend the 1997 reformist constitution.

The amendments, which require assent by at least half the 700 members of the House and Senate, would allow Mr. Thaksin to amass more power and wipe out democratic gains of recent decades through bloody uprisings against authoritarian regimes, they warn.

With Mr. Thaksin showing approval ratings of as high as 80 per cent, the Democrat Party is seemingly resigned to defeat and is simply urging voters to give it enough seats in the house — 201 — to rein in the Government's excesses by calling no-confidence motions.

Mr. Thaksin, fatigued after a strenuous campaign, spent part of Saturday walking through a public park and a residential area shaking hands and handing out his party's fliers. — AP