

Theoretical Organ of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party

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Footnotes to the Book of Setback

Nizar Qabbani

(21 March 1923 – 30 April 1998)

Arab children,
Corn ears of the future,
You will break our chains.
Kill the opium in our heads,
Kill the illusions.
Arab children,
Don't read about our suffocated generation,
We are a hopeless case,
As worthless as a water-melon rind.
Don't read about us,
Don't ape us,
Don't accept us,
Don't accept our ideas,
We are a nation of crooks and jugglers.
Arab children,
Spring rain,
Corn ears of the future,
You are the generation that will overcome defeat.

[* Nizar Qabbani, Syrian-born diplomat and poet, moved to Beirut in 1967, and London in 1981 after his wife's killing and remained there until his death.]

From the Editor's Desk

Imperialism has come a long way since its colonial era. Direct military interventions are less common, but not altogether absent. It uses one section of the population of a country against another. Even more subtly, it uses the threat of potential civil war to subdue wayward rulers. Many rulers, who mouth anti-imperialist slogans to appease the strongly anti-imperialist sections of their support base, make deals behind scenes with imperialism and submit to economic conditions laid down by the IMF, the World Bank and other arms of imperialism.

Emerging capitalist economic powers like China and India are, sometimes grudgingly, partners of imperialism and some are already asserting themselves in their respective regions in hegemonic fashion. The conduct of India has been particularly notorious in the case of Sri Lanka. India has used the pretext of the rising economic influence of China to apply political pressure on Sri Lanka.

The establishment of two Deputy High Commissioner's offices for India in addition to the long existing one in Kandy has no justification, since no other country, including Sri Lanka's old colonial master, the UK, has more than one embassy in this small island. The Indian diplomatic mission has, since the bloody anti-Tamil violence of 1983, been blatantly meddling in the affairs of the country, except briefly, following the formal withdrawal of Indian troops in 1990.

India meddled in a big way to impose its will on Sri Lanka in 1987 in the name of resolving the national question which, partly with India's assistance, developed into armed conflict. It meddled again in the national question to subvert a fragile peace process, initiated in 2002 and under siege by chauvinistic forces, in order to ensure that the West does not gain the upper hand by parading as patrons of a successful peace process. On the pretext of curbing Chinese and Pakistani influence in Sri Lanka, it fought a covert war against the LTTE alongside the Sri Lankan government, and in the process contributed to the killing of tens of thousands of unarmed civilians.

Indian High Commissioners in this millennium have conducted themselves Viceroy-like, as High Commissioner JN Dikshit did from 1987 until his departure in 1989. There have been instances of unwelcome meddling by Indian diplomats in local affairs, besides the use of 'cultural' activities to buy influence— which of course is something that other missions indulge in on a smaller scale.

However, the Deputy High Commissioner in Jaffna set a new precedent in breaching diplomatic protocol by threatening a judge of a Sri Lankan court of law regarding the custody of 136 Indian fishermen (arrested while fishing near the Sri Lankan coast by local fishermen and handed over to the police). What is sad is that the Sri Lankan government yielded to Indian pressure wielded at the level of the High Commission and higher. It is a bad sign, and will be a precedent for meddling by other diplomatic missions in matters that concern the welfare of the people. What has thus been compromised is not just the sovereignty of the state but, more importantly, that of the people

This would have been unimaginable before 1983, even under governments that were submissive to imperialism on matters of economic and foreign policy. What is even more disgraceful is that while the political parties of Tamilnadu are seeking to make capital of the problem by demanding the release of the fishermen arrested for poaching, there has been little forthcoming by way of protest from Sri Lankan parliamentary politicians about the high-handed activities of Indian diplomats. (The impending election for the state assembly is an important factor in Tamilnadu). Not even the JVP, which has of late been denouncing Indian economic expansionism, has condemned the Indian diplomats or expressed support for the fishermen. One would not normally expect anything critical of India from the Tamil nationalists who have sold themselves lock, stock and barrel to the rulers of India.

The warning that the recent events carry for us is not just about India, whose conduct may have been a little clumsy compared to that of the more sophisticated imperialists. It is against every existing and potential imperialist power and all forms of hegemony. Foreign investments in the sectors of agriculture, fishery and forestry will mean concessions to big capitalists and multi-national companies backed by the might of powerful states wielding influence over the government.

We have let it happen by allowing the ruling classes to divert attention from basic economic issues through heightening the national contradictions and transforming them into hostile contradictions. It is about time that the trend is reversed. That requires building a strong anti-imperialist national economy, for which a necessary precondition is the unity of all nationalities and the toiling masses.

Wars and Disappearances

E Thambiah

[Given below is a slightly edited text of the address by Comrade E Thambiah, International Organiser of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party, at the First Plenary Session of the Sixth International Conference Against Disappearances from 9th to 12th December 2011 in London.]

International Humanitarian Law is specifically dealing with or concerned about individuals and groups at war or where there is armed conflict between resistance movements / liberation movements and the state/government security forces.

Resistance against injustice, unreasonableness and social injustice is an inherent right of an individual as well as communities. Resistance perhaps would lead to violence that is not individual terrorism or group terrorism or crime. Suppression of resistance through armed operation of the state security, alone or with the help of paramilitaries, is more or less war. Therefore war does not only mean armed operations between two state security forces or alignments of security forces.

In such situations states or governments tend to claim that the international humanitarian law is wrong and only relevant under a normal situation.

Besides, the state/government passes special laws to suppress resistance and to justify its violation of human rights and humanitarian norms. On the other hand, even under a normal situation there is no value for humanitarian norms within the framework of the so-called rule of law, other than shallow regulations/rules (of military discipline) on paper.

In these circumstances International Humanitarian Law is indulged as the means of protection of individuals and/or groups. It was believed that the Humanitarian Law, unlike International Human Rights Law, was inspired by feelings of humanity and centred on the protection of the individual in times of war and/or internal armed conflict, and the treatment of prisoners of war, hostages, surrendered persons and civilians.

International Humanitarian Law is mostly contained in the four conventions of 1949 and the protocols of 1977. It is about war and warlike situations and deals with the protection of victims of armed conflict. It has very specific provisions forbidding killings, involuntary removal or forced disappearances, torture of captives, taking of hostages, imposition of collective punishment and inflicting of avoidable hardships on civilians, among others. Moreover, the International Humanitarian Law imposes obligations on government forces as well resistance and/or liberation armed groups.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has formulated the contents of treaty and customary law under humanitarian law with regard to armed conflicts, as follows:

- A** Persons *hors de combat* and those who do not take a direct part in hostilities are entitled to respect for their lives and their moral and physical integrity. They shall in all circumstances be protected and treated humanely without any adverse distinction.
- B** It is forbidden to kill or injure an enemy who surrenders or who is *hors de combat*.
- C** The wounded and sick shall be collected and cared for by the party to the conflict which has them in its power. Protection also covers medical personnel, establishments, transports and equipment. The emblem of the Red Cross or the Red Crescent is the sign of such protection and must be respected.
- D** Captured combatants and civilians under the authority of an adverse party are entitled to respect for their lives, dignity, personal rights and convictions. They shall be protected against all acts of violence and reprisals. They shall have the right to correspond with their families and to receive relief.
- E** Everyone shall be entitled to benefit from fundamental judicial guarantees. No one shall be held responsible for an act he has not committed. No one shall be subjected to physical or mental torture, corporal punishment or cruel or degrading treatment.

F Parties to a conflict and members of their armed forces do not have an unlimited choice of methods and means of warfare. It is prohibited to employ weapons or methods of warfare of a nature to cause unnecessary losses or excessive suffering.

G Parties to a conflict shall at all times distinguish between the civilian population and combatants in order to spare civilian population and property. Neither the civilian population as such nor civilian persons shall be the object of attack. Attacks shall be directed solely against military objectives.

The rules may not be complete and may not be acceptable to all, but they are the basic rules put forward before the world community. The violations of same are tantamount to war crimes.

The international institutions that are expected to observe and take action against governments or individuals who disobeyed or acted in contravention of the rules are in the hands of hegemonic forces such as the US and powerful Western states, and have, except in one or two instances, not strictly pursued the matters when the rules were violated by the forces of the state themselves and constituted war crimes.

Apart from the above hegemonic forces, most of the countries are either aligned with them or their client states. Therefore attempts to charge them for war crimes, where they have violated the said rules, have proven futile before the so-called international forums.

This situation encourages parties to armed conflicts, mainly the state or the government, to implement repressive measures such as the involuntary removal of persons and forced disappearances of combatants as well as civilians. It can be seen from the wars in Bosnia, Afghanistan, Iraq and other Asian, African and Latin American countries during and after the period of war or armed conflict. In short, disappearances have become day-to-day occurrences.

On that basis, I will share some of my opinions and information about disappearances during and after the period of war.

The call for the fulfilment of the aspirations of the Tamils and other minorities (especially the Muslims and Hill Country Tamils) of Sri Lanka, denied to them by the Sinhala Buddhist chauvinistic elite classes of Sri Lanka, got transformed into armed resistance by Tamil nationalist youths since around 1980. From the very inception, there were forced disappearances of Tamils. The government as well as the Tamil nationalist movements are responsible for the disappearances, but successive governments have been responsible for most.

It has been reported in the newspapers, despite denial by President Mahinda Rajapaksa, that approximately 287 000 people were displaced and 40 000 were killed in the last days of the war in May 2009 in the Vanni region which was controlled by the LTTE. He accepted that one or two civilians could have been trapped and killed and that the Sri Lankan security forces attacked only the terrorists but not civilians.

The Government claimed that the number of arrested persons was 10 000 and that between 5000 and 6000 of them have been released after screening and rehabilitation, whereas unofficial reports reveal that more than 30 000 people were arrested and that very few of them have been released, and that some of those released were taken into custody again and some are missing.

According to Lakshman Kiriella opposition (UNP) Member of Parliament, there are 9000 political prisoners in Sri Lanka (Thinakkural, Tamil daily 3rd December 2010), and around 11 000 according to an Australian parliamentarian (Thinakkural, Tamil daily 5th December 2010).

According N Sathasiva Iyer, Additional Registrar General, the Department of the Registrar will issue death certificates for disappeared or missing person as soon as possible and the number of persons reported as missing in the Jaffna Peninsula since 1990 is 1000; and so far no parent of a missing person has been compensated.

It has been reported in the media that 87 000 women (50 000 in the Northern Province and 37 000 in the Eastern Province) became widows as a result of 30 years of armed conflict, which implies that 87 000 men have been killed or have been disappeared.

During the war and in the post-war period, Tamil businessmen and personalities were abducted and some of them were released after paying large sums as ransom to the abductors. Bodies of some abductees were found and the whereabouts of the rest remain unknown.

It was continuously reported that people in the Northern and Eastern Provinces made submissions about the disappearance of their loved ones before the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission appointed by the President of Sri Lanka to make recommendations to him about measures to be taken to prevent the re-emergence of separatism and terrorism, although the LLRC had no mandate to inquire into disappearances.

There are detainees belonging to the Sinhala community branded as 'Sinhala Tigers', who have allegedly aided the LTTE. Some army and police personnel too have been held in custody on suspicion of helping the LTTE. Among the Sinhalese detainees are leaders of trade unions, journalists and teachers who have raised their voice on behalf of the Tamil people. There are a few left/revolutionary activists and leaders who have been detained for long as they were involved in resistance movements against anti-people programmes of the governments and demanded a political solution to the ethnic problem of Sri Lanka. The oppressive measures, seemingly against the minorities, are actually and basically against democracy, the right to self determination of the minorities, and human rights.

There have been journalists subjected to threats: Ekneligoda, a Sinhala journalist who has allegedly reported in his on-line news the security forces of Sri Lanka had used chemical weapons during the war in May 2009, has been missing for the past one year.

There are reports and advertisements that appear daily in the media about disappearances of Tamils, including businessmen: Kanapathy Kunaratnam, a Tamil businessman from the Colombo suburb of Wattala disappeared on 24th November 2010, and his body was found in Colombo 6 on 25th November 2010; another businessman, Melo Kunja disappeared on 22nd November 2010 from Colombo 13 and his body was found later by the side of the rail track in Colombo 6. The police say that they are investigating the deaths to ascertain whether the dead committed suicide or were murdered. Bodies of some members of the Muslim community have been found. And it was claimed that they were involved in drug peddling and were killed by their enemies: Patani Razeek of Puttalam, the founder of a social trust fund is missing for the past 10 months. Thus, disappearances in Sri Lanka do not exclude any nationality but mostly affects Tamils.

National and international laws warrant all governments to answer and be held responsible for the disappearances of their citizens and residents in their respective territories. Nationally, a writ of Habeas Corpus application before the Court of Appeal is the prerogative remedy for disappearances, but now the scope of such applications has become senseless. There was also a committee comprising some parliamentarians to receive complaints of disappearances, but it has done no justice to the victims.

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka has the mandate to look into disappearances, but that serves no purpose since the SLHRC has no enforcing authority.

Internationally, there have been some commendable measures taken against states which were responsible for disappearances. For example, in 1981, the Inter-American Commission held the Honduran government responsible for the disappearance of Velaquez Rodriguez, a university student. Now the so called International Community, comprising the world's hegemonic forces, is directly or indirectly patronising states which force disappearances and violate human rights.

There have been calls from political parties, social organisations and individuals demanding the Government of Sri Lanka as well as international institutions to investigate disappearances and/or war crimes alleged to have been committed during the war (the 'humanitarian operation' according to the Government of Sri Lanka), that ended on 19th May 2009, to release political prisoners, to resettle the displaced people with proper compensation and facilities, and to establish justice for the victims.

The need for investigation into war crimes including disappearances is totally rejected by the Government of Sri Lanka, and despite mutterings by the 'Committee of Experts' of the UN Secretary General, no meaningful step has been taken.

Therefore this conference should urge the Government of Sri Lanka and international institutions to take meaningful measures in this regard, at least with the available mainstream resources. This course of action should be followed with respect to other governments on the question of disappearances and violation of human rights.

Apart from these, I invite local organisations as well as international organisations like the International Committee Against Disappearances, with their alternative approaches, to accept complaints about, and investigate and inquire into disappearances and violation of human rights, with the view to exposing the truth to the people of the world for them to implement justice, transcending the limitations of sovereign states and the 'International Community'.

Finally, only a political solution acceptable to the Tamils, Muslims and Hill Country Tamils of Sri Lanka would heal and soothe the wounds of war and violation of human rights.

Nationalism and Nationhood under Neo-colonialism - 2

Creation of Nations

Imayavaramban

The nation state came into being to serve the interests of capital, but the uneven development of capitalism and its use of colonialism as a means of control over natural resources, trade and human resources had implications for the development and emergence of nations in territories under direct or indirect colonial rule. The development of capitalism as imperialism around the start of the twentieth century further aggravated relations between various ethnic groups and communities that had existed in relative harmony, despite conflicts among their rulers for power and hegemony.

The manner in which the colonial powers set out to wield control over different regions varied from one colonial power to another as well as on the extent to which capitalist production had advanced at home. The manner in which they exercised control also depended on the predominant social structure that existed in any region.

The emergence of states in Latin America, in the Arab regions of the Middle East and in Africa, despite fundamental differences, show how 'nations' and national boundaries were created out of territories without defined boundaries to suit the interests of the colonial powers concerned, and ignoring feasible boundaries based on political or ethnic identity.

In contrast, in South Asia, British colonialism made a single state out of a land mass with ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural identities more diverse than in the whole of Europe. The colonial powers that controlled China did not impose direct colonial rule there. Instead, they exercised control over relatively small, but strategically important, regions. Ethno-linguistically and culturally distinct regions

comprising Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos came became the federated colony of Indochina under French colonialism.

When colonial rule neared its demise, imperialism resorted to neo-colonial control. Direct control continued where possible, at times by dividing countries with no national rationale for it or by holding on to un-liberated parts of countries. The US, following the defeat of the Guomintang (KMT) in China, helped Jiang Kaishek to establish the Republic of China in the island of Taiwan, recognised by the UN under US persuasion as the lawful government of China, until 1972. The political and economic isolation imposed on China by imperialism obstructed the liberation of the Chinese territories of Hong Kong and Macau from the British and Portuguese, respectively, until near the end of the 20th Century. When the KMT regime lost its status as the lawful government of China, however, the US conspired with secessionists in Taiwan to call for independence from China.

US dominance over Vietnam following the end of colonial rule and over Korea following the defeat of the Japanese occupiers was achieved by prolonged partition of the countries —Vietnam until 1975 and Korea to this day. Imperialism, on the other hand, besides promoting ethnic Malay domination in Malaya, backed the founding of the Federation of Malaysia —comprising Malaya, Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak— in 1963, amid strong Indonesian objection to the merging with Malaya of Sabah and Sarawak in the north of the island of Kalimantan (Borneo), most of which is in Indonesia. Singapore was expelled from the federation in 1965 following an ethnic conflict in Singapore in 1964. Notably, British colonial rulers ensured that the tiny oil rich Sultanate of Brunei was an independent state.

Thus it can be seen that people and regions outside Europe have been grouped as countries, based on imperialist interests, under colonial rule as well as under neo-colonial domination.

Victorious anti-colonial struggles persuaded some Arab leaders to think in terms of political unity of Arabs. The United Arab Republic comprising Egypt and Syria, founded in 1958, however, fell apart in 1961. An Iraqi proposal soon after to re-establish the UAR to include Iraq alongside Egypt and Syria failed. It is thus evident that, despite desire for Arab unity among the people, divisions created among the ruling elite, class interests and alliances with imperialist forces have obstructed not only the Pan-Arabism but also Arab unity on matters affecting the Arab people. Imperialist control of the Middle East would not have lasted almost as long as a century following the fall of the Ottoman Empire early last century if not for the weakening of

Arab nationalism by fragmentation. Imperialism and Zionism rely heavily on the division of the Arab World based on rivalry among the ruling elite while ensuring that few strategically important states remain clients of US imperialism for their survival against the anger of the oppressed population.

Imperialism, besides causing the division of the contiguous Kurdish territory mostly between Turkey, Iraq and Iran, was also a strong opponent of the right of the Kurds to self-determination, at least until it suited US imperialism to use self-determination to bait the Iraqi Kurds to weaken Iraq, although not Turkish Kurds, yet.

While the Portuguese colony in South America remained more or less intact as one country (Brazil), the Spanish colonies splintered into several countries based largely on Spanish colonial administrative regions (vice-royalties). The republic of Gran Colombia —comprising the predominantly Spanish-speaking territories of present-day Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador and Panama, and parts of other countries— established under the initiative of Simon de Bolivar, a progressive thinker and an important figure in the anti-colonial struggle, was short-lived (1819-1831), but the Bolivarian spirit has been revived a decade ago amid the anti-imperialist upsurge in South America.

The British, French and Dutch colonial rulers held on to their relatively small territories in South America, while the weakening of Spanish rule led to the ceding of further territory to the British and the French in North America and the Caribbean and later to the westward and southward expansion of the United States of America since its emergence out of British occupied territories in 1776. French colonists lost their hold in most of North America, formally ceding Quebec to the British in 1763 and Louisiana to the US in 1803.

What is important about the national identities that emerged out of centuries of colonial intervention in the Americas is that the language, culture and even religion are still seen as those of the occupying powers at the expense of what really constitutes the identity of the indigenous people. The settlement of Africans and, to a less extent, Indians (mostly from the south) as slaves or indentured labourers added newer ethnic identities as did mixing between the races.

Mass uprisings and left governments led to state recognition of indigenous people as nationalities or national minorities and granting of legal status to indigenous languages. Peru granted official language status to Quechua and Aymara in 1975; and Venezuela in 1999 and Bolivia in 2009 made all indigenous languages official languages.

In contrast to South and Central America, with a large number of Spanish speaking countries, North America comprises just three nation states —with the US expanding its territory even in the 20th Century— while the US now encourages secessionist movements in South and Central America, already divided among several nations. The push for secession is, however, based on class interests that coincide with the imperialist interests rather than on ethnicity.

The indigenous people have been thoroughly marginalised and, given the degree of mixing with other races, the prospects for nationhood of any of the indigenous people are poor. But in the past two decades or so they have become assertive of their rights. Given the diverse identities of the indigenous people, not only is secession not feasible it is also not in their interest. What is sought therefore is their rightful share in the wealth of the country and the rights to their identity and to lead their lives in ways that are most appropriate to the communities. Thus the 'nationalism' of the indigenous people throughout the American continents has aspirations vastly different from that of nationalism elsewhere, except, perhaps that of the marginalised indigenous people of India. It also has features in common with 'Black Consciousness' in the US following the abolition of slavery, including a spirit of anti-imperialism and anti-racism.

The formation of nation states also led to the marginalisation and denial of traditional territory of nomadic people like the Gypsies across Europe and considerably undermined the territorial rights of the Sami in the arctic region of Europe. The emergence of the nation state, especially the ones with arbitrarily determined boundaries as in Africa, have divided communities and affected the livelihood as well as identity of tribal and ethnic groups.

The concept of the right to self determination has been tampered with by the United Nations which recognises the right to self determination only for aggregated populations of territories under colonial or foreign domination, thus denying that right to many tribal and indigenous people who form minority groups within those aggregated populations. Such minorities suffer colonial style discrimination and face the prospect of assimilation or extinction under a state acting in the name of a majority.

The global search for mineral resources has become a threat to the existence of indigenous people. Despite the UN General Assembly adopting in 2006 the UN Draft Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples to protect against discrimination, racism, oppression, marginalisation and exploitation, after spending 20 years to draft and

agree, amid stiff resistance by the US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, imperialism and its client states continue to act in breach of the principles. (See “Rights of Indigenous People” by Anup Shah in www.globalissues.org/article/693/rights-of-indigenous-people for an extensive comment on the subject).

Imperialism, despite its notorious record of denying freedom to nations and nationalities, has helped in creation of new nations, by transplanting populations, as in the case of Israel, and breaking up countries by inducing ethnic and national conflicts. In some instances, like for example in Ethiopia and Sudan, the cases for self determination of Eritrea and South Sudan, respectively, were strong since both countries were creations of imperialism. Imperialism for geopolitical reasons, changed sides on the question of Eritrea following a change of regime in Ethiopia, and encouraged the secession of South Sudan, well after the region was granted autonomy. The same is true of imperialist attempts to break up Somalia, which are not much unlike the attempted secession of Katanga from Congo in the early 1960s and Biafra from Nigeria in the late 1960s.

The break-up of Yugoslavia and the subsequent secession of Kosovo Province from Serbia were not motivated by any altruistic considerations but out of the interest of the US and certain European imperialist states to wrest control of these regions from a state that has resisted imperialist domination, however weakly.

The Third World has diverse identities, with which societies have coped, and countries have survived without serious ethnic conflict. The national question in the Third World owes much of its complexity to colonialism and now imperialism, whose interest in the right to self determination of populations and the creation of nation states has been driven by a single purpose, namely global control.

Imperialism is likely to aggressively pursue an agenda of supporting nationalist causes in contexts where states tend to defy imperialism, while allowing oppression of nationalities and indigenous people to continue unchecked elsewhere. In all cases imperialism keeps the oppressed people divided.

The lesson for oppressed people therefore is to find ways of resolving their respective national questions in ways that will not allow imperialist and hegemonic intervention in their affairs.

(To be continued)

Reconciliation Commission in Post War Sri Lanka: an Appraisal

Asvaththaamaa

Introduction

President Mahinda Rajapaksa named an eight-member 'Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission' to report on the lessons to be learnt from the events between 21st February 2002 and 19th May 2009. The Commission, initially mandated for six months from 15th May 2010, had its term extended by six months. It has been charged with reporting whether any person, group or institution directly or indirectly bears responsibility for offences committed in that period.

The specificity of the period itself is interesting, as it starts with the day before the signing of Cease Fire Agreement, and the Memorandum of Understanding between Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) and the LTTE (22nd February 2002) and ends with the conclusion of the war. Thus, any event before 21st February 2002 or after 19th May 2009 will not be looked into. Significantly, the anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983, the burning of the Jaffna Library in 1981, and grave violations of human rights in the 1990s will not be considered by the Commission. Given its rather narrow and somewhat peculiar mandate, not unlike many other Sri Lankan government commissions of inquiry into matters of public interest, the Commission could arbitrarily select events, without a specific order or category to inquire into. The Commission is also mandated to have no public hearings, since its purpose is to find out "the institutional administrative and legislative measures which need to be taken in order to prevent any recurrence of such concerns in the future and to promote further national unity and reconciliation among all communities".

It was clear from the very outset that the Commission was set up in *ad hoc* fashion, without much serious thought, at a time when the GoSL was actively manoeuvring to save the GSP+ concession which

was on the verge of withdrawal. The record of recent GoSL-appointed commissions suggests that the present commission too will achieve little more than keeping a few retired judges and civil servants busy. The fate of the findings of the Commission of Inquiry (CoI) set up by the GoSL in November 2006, to investigate and inquire into serious violations of Human Rights remains a mystery. Its investigations were to be monitored by a International Independent Group of Eminent Persons, which terminated its mission in March 2008, protesting that the proceedings of the CoI were not transparent and failed to meet international norms, and charging the Government of Sri Lanka of 'absence of will' to 'investigate cases with vigour, with the conduct of its own forces being called into question'.

Against this backdrop and based on history, let us first examine the concept of "reconciliation commissions", their salient features and major pitfalls of such exercises conducted elsewhere.

Looking Back

Post-conflict attempts at justice are not new: war crimes trials date back the fourteenth century if not earlier. Following both World Wars there were trials, successful and otherwise. Although torturers were tried and sentenced after the fall of the Greek military dictatorship of the 1970s, consensus among the elite deferred questions of justice and reparations in post-Franco Spain and in post-Salazar Portugal. There have been other such instances in South America and Africa. The South African experience is the best known of experiments with post-conflict reconciliation. Although an amnesty law was required of the country's interim constitution to achieve it, Parliament decided to link amnesty to full disclosure of crimes committed. This amnesty-for-truth process was grafted onto a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) aimed at hearing the stories of the victims documenting the violations, and making recommendations for change.

Advocates of the TRC did not merely argue that a truth commission was a second-best alternative when trials were not possible. Rather, they insisted, that a well-run commission could accomplish things that no trial could provide. It could, thus, focus on the overall pattern of violations, rather than zeroing in on just those instances to be brought to trial; and maintain the focus of testimony and discussion on the victims rather than on the perpetrators, thereby allowing victims to testify in a supportive setting that was more conducive to healing than the sometimes brutal cross-examination characteristic of criminal or civil court trials. By offering amnesty in exchange for confession, it

could elicit information from perpetrators that is unlikely to emerge in a criminal trial with the burden of proof lying with the state. Moreover, non-judicial methods were considered better at dealing with the many shades of gray characterising most conflicts, since trials divide the universe into a minority of guilty parties and an innocent majority, automatically cleansed of wrongdoing. In reality, however, many among those who supported the perpetrators of the offences or turned a blind eye to the offences chose to be silent. Trials could not adequately engage with such nuances.

The South African example, despite wide international acclaim, received a critical reception at home. Despite many positive aspects, the TRC did not lead automatically to reconciliation either between blacks and whites or among blacks. ("Revealing is healing" turned out to be true only occasionally). Almost no high-ranking official of the apartheid government came forward to seek amnesty, and the courts were mostly unwilling to pursue cases, even well-founded ones, against those who disdained the offer of amnesty for truth.

A process of diffusion of experiences and ideas followed. Chileans advised the South Africans on their TRC; the South Africans adopted the idea of confession in exchange for amnesty or leniency in a number of instances. The authors of the peace agreement designed the Guatemalan Historical Clarification Commission so that it did not emulate key aspects of the earlier El Salvadoran Truth Commission. The experience of each country was unique, and subject to the influence not only of international advisors and funding agencies but also the strength of its own human rights movements and of opposing political forces and the nature and degree of the conflict.

Truth Commission

The emphasis on "truth" required a theory of why the truth was so important. In Latin America, the rationale was tied to the nature of the repression. For the most part, the military governments did not kill their opponents openly. It rather 'disappeared' them: people were picked up in large numbers by official or unofficial security forces that then refused to acknowledge the detention. Almost all were killed, often after prolonged torture, and the bodies were seldom recovered. Unofficial death squads wore civilian clothes to provide a measure of deniability. As a climate of generalised terror set in, the families of the 'disappeared' were ostracised.

Truth commissions became a staple of the transitional justice, and such commissions seemed to assume that there was a single “truth” to be moulded out of disparate strands of interests and experience. They could, at best, contribute to a compiling of “factual” truth, but not necessarily to the creation of a common narrative or common understanding. They were frustrated in their endeavours and at times even re-traumatised victims who, having unearthed their pain, were left wondering to what end. The model of short-term catharsis as a basis for healing was disputed by therapists, and empirical evidence showed that testifying in public benefitted only some victims. The truth commissions did nothing to alter local power relationships.

While truth commissions became widely known, other elements of the transitional justice “toolbox” were used far less frequently. In 1994, the slaughter in Rwanda of over 750,000 people within three months prompted the creation of an international criminal tribunal for Rwanda. When the bloody ethnic conflict in former Yugoslavia left 200,000 dead, western powers dithered, and eventually agreed to act to deter ongoing atrocities by setting up an international criminal tribunal. Notably, these were not cases where a rigid security force hierarchy under state control attacked perceived enemies of the state. Rather, they were murkier situations involving ethnic and resource-based conflicts with rather loose chains of command.

Often, ethnically based conflicts set community against community, and neighbour against neighbour. Only trials could provide for the confrontation of evidence and witnesses that could create an unimpeachable factual record; and only trials could adequately individualise responsibility, holding the guilty parties liable without stigmatising entire social groups. This is important to avoid continuing bouts of violence as well as the temptation of private revenge.

The two major trends, namely an increase in the use of investigative or “truth and reconciliation” commissions and the use of international and transnational trials, came together by the beginning of the new millennium. The debate about truth versus justice seemed to be resolving in favour of an approach that recognised them as complementary. Even those who once argued strenuously in favour of a non-prosecutorial, “truth-centred” approach identified exceptions in crimes against humanity, while advocates of prosecution argued that a truth-seeking and truth-telling exercise could serve as a valuable precursor or complement if not substitute for prosecutions.

Other Cases

Sierra Leone has had both a Truth Commission and a Special Court, and East Timor has had both a Commission for Truth, Reception and Reconciliation, and Special Panels for Serious Crimes. The relative timing of such efforts has varied: in some cases, the two mechanisms functioned simultaneously, and in others, as in Argentina and Chad, a truth commission preceded prosecutions, either deliberately or because conditions for prosecution came about several years after the truth commission finished its work. In a few cases, like the former Yugoslavia (and perhaps Mexico or Iraq), prosecutions came first, and the need for a complementary truth commission became apparent only afterwards.

Beyond the truth commission/court bifurcation, a whole array of methods developed for combining truth-seeking and prosecutorial functions. The Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for example, had a special unit tasked to accumulate and organise evidence of crimes (and criminals) that could be presented to prosecutors. The Mexican Special Prosecutor, in contrast, had a citizen advisory committee whose task was to compile a historical record, while the current Colombian proposal envisions a Commission with the same mission. Increasingly, the issue is one of carrying out multiple functions, namely compiling a factual record of the conflict, listening to and recording the stories of the victims, recommending changes to avoid recurrence, sanctions against at least the main perpetrators of serious crimes, and means of both sanctioning and rehabilitating other perpetrators. The form and timing of the mechanisms and institutions for carrying out these functions are becoming increasingly diverse, tailored to local conditions, and subject to constraints within a broad framework of international legal and political exigencies. As this flowering of approaches progresses, new questions arise, while some old ones are replayed.

Memory in Post War

Today, civilians, especially women and children, are increasingly in the front line. This is evident from the casualty statistics which show that while the First World War recorded 10% civilian casualties and the Second World War around 50%, in all subsequent wars around 80% of the casualties have been civilians. Or, to put it differently, the ratio of soldiers to civilians killed in armed conflict has increased roughly 36 fold (changing from 9:1 to 1:4).

What has captured the attention of the academic community about these conflicts, however, seems to be the depth of feelings that they appear to generate, their longevity and the challenge that they pose to those who seek to explain the phenomenon and the even greater challenge to those who would wish to control or conclude them.

While memory may play an important role in creating or recreating conflict, in reactivating it in the form in which it may have lain dormant, perhaps for several generations, that is not the most important role of memory in conflict.

The potential for future conflict exists because ethnic conflict often leads to violence that in turn invites collective revenge. This revenge need not be based on some 'ancient' quarrel (although it has the chance of being so); it could be based on a quarrel that is only a generation old. However long the time-scale, ethnic conflicts are always grounded in the past. The problem is that when one community takes revenge on another. That in turn sows the seeds for the propagation of violence. Hence, to bring ethnic conflict under control, it is necessary to understand the role of the collective past in the collective present.

A survey by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation suggests that the majority of white South Africans are unconvinced that they played a role in apartheid abuses. And over 40% of those surveyed think that apartheid was a good idea badly executed. This is an important lesson to learn and, based on it, one may ask whether LLRC will bring reconciliation among communities in Sri Lanka.

Is peace possible without Justice?

As expressed succinctly by Guatemalan Nobel Peace Laureate, Rigoberta Menchu, and by many before her and many since, 'peace without justice is only a symbolic peace'. While the relationship between peace and justice seems almost axiomatic, it is not simply a matter 'remarrying' the two, as it were, once violent conflict has ripped them asunder.

Yet, restoring justice after conflict is as much a political imperative as a social necessity. Political leaders will not make concessions. Yet, remarrying peace with justice after conflict has torn them apart is a complex and contentious task that is rarely undertaken comprehensively, producing inadequate results and often setting back the peace itself.

The necessary starting point in seeking to restore justice after conflict is to first understand the kinds of injustice suffered by ordinary people during conflict. It then becomes clear that injustice is not just a *consequence* of conflict, but is also a *symptom* and *cause* of conflict.

Peace, justice, truth and compassion are central to most utopian and religious visions. For example, the concepts of Paradise and Nirvana both have strong connotations of justice, harmony, non-violence and union. These aspirations reflect the religious viewpoint in most communities and cultures that most people when confronted with choices between order and chaos, peace and war, harmony and disharmony, structural stability and instability, equality and inequality, inclusion and exclusion, justice and injustice, tolerance and intolerance or abundance and poverty will tend to choose the former over the latter.

The critical question, therefore, is how to ensure that these normal feelings of kindness, altruism, reciprocity, justice and courtesy are translated into strong political commitments to justice, peace and conflict sensitive development. Why are these seemingly universal impulses so difficult to realise in political practice?

It will be difficult to tackle the deeper questions of structural violence and socioeconomic injustice without paying attention to the institutions, mechanisms and processes that generate order and effective participatory governance. Kalevi Holsti, in his study of recent complex humanitarian emergencies (Kalevi Holsti, *the State, War and the State of War*, Cambridge University Press, 1996) asserts that: wars of the late twentieth century are not about foreign policy, security, honour or status; they are about statehood, governance and the role and status of nations and communities within states.

He identifies some of the political factors that are likely to result in such emergency or large-scale organised violence as: "The risk of an emergency is likely to increase with two or more distinct ethnic, language, or religious communities; among countries which acquired independence after 1945; where there is government exclusion and persecution of distinct social groups; where there is rule by kleptocrats or entrenched minorities; and where there is weak government legitimacy."

Holsti concludes from his study of their relevance to 17 cases that it is not ethnic hatred or group divisions which generated violent behaviour, but the deliberate and intentional acts of politicians and

government officials who organised violence against different groups within the communities under their control.

Reconsidering Post War Sri Lanka

President Rajapaksa establishing the LLRC said that Sri Lanka is fulfilling its commitment made at the Security Council last year to initiate a domestic mechanism for fact finding and reconciliation. The LLRC is to provide a "historic bridge" between the past and future, help ensure no reoccurrence of the conflict and "re-establish trust" between the communities.

People who have testified before the Commission did not admit to mistakes made by them while they were in office. It was basically a matter of passing the blame on to another person. Although the LLRC was said to be transparent, local and international media including the BBC were prevented from covering certain sessions in North and in the Boosa detention camp. Further, during the sessions, CR de Silva, Chairman of the LLRC, repeatedly insisted that there is no ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka and that there was only a terrorist problem. That did not seem to bother most of the members of the Commission. It made one wonder whether they are there because it is a well paid job for retirees.

During his introductory speech the LLRC sessions in Jaffna, the Chairman of the LLRC kept insisting on the need for a "Sri Lankan" identity and the need to rise above ethnic and religious differences and that what they are seeking to do is to create that common identity. Further, the commissioners conceded that surrendeers are under detention in secret camps without their names being given out. They promised that they will visit those camps as well.

Conclusion

Almost all the sessions of the LLRC are over. Many questions remain unanswered and may continue to be so. There is no sign of action by the President on the interim recommendations of the LLRC submitted to him, which casts doubt on action on the final set of recommendations from LLRC. Questions relating to disappearances, missing persons, and the events of the last days of war, detentions and many other issue still echo on the sidelines of the LLRC. It seems that the issue of accountability will remain unaddressed, as a reflection of the bitter reality of the post war situation in Sri Lanka.

Serial Arms Purchases by the New Delhi Government

Peter Custers

On December the 20th and 21st last year, Russia's President Medvedev paid a two day visit to New Delhi. On this occasion, he signed a large number of contracts with India's government of Manmohan Singh. The most prominent agreements, as reported in the world press, related to arms sales and to construction of nuclear reactors. One mega-order focused on the supply of *three hundred* advanced fighter planes. Spread over a period of ten years, Russia is set to sell 'fifth generation' military aircraft to India. The order is presently valued at more than 25 billion Euros. Under another agreement, Russia will help India construct two more nuclear reactors, on top of the two reactors it is already building in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu.

At first sight, these deals may not seem very sensational. Russia's military and nuclear relations with India have a long history, dating back to the era of the former Soviet Union. Until the early nineties, roughly eighty percent of the military hardware used by India's armed forces was of Soviet origin. Subsequently, in the first post-Soviet period, relations temporarily 'dipped', as both sides quarrelled over India's outstanding debt which Russian sources have estimated at 16 billion dollars. Yet in the later part of the 1990s, military-commercial relations between the two powers were reconsolidated. Today, the majority of the armaments used by the Indian military still hail from Russia (1).

Thus, the outcome of Medvedev's Delhi visit may seem unexceptional. Yet President Medvedev is not the only leader of a world power who recently prioritised visiting the Indian capital. In fact, his visit was closely, very closely preceded— by visits of US President Obama, in November, of French President Sarkozy in the beginning of December, and of the Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao. The latter statesman happened to be in Delhi just before Medvedev arrived, on December the 19th. Of these three Delhi state

events, the ones featuring Obama and Sarkozy are especially noteworthy, if one is to assess India's current policy regarding foreign military and nuclear purchases. Thus, the American president-salesman when in New Delhi succeeded in finalising two defence deals.

The more important of these two covers the sale of ten military transport planes, i.e. specimen of the C-17 Globemaster III airlift aircraft, manufactured by the US's Boeing Corporation. The plane reportedly can carry tanks and combat troops over 2,500 nautical miles. Again, the French president-salesman brought home to his capital contracts for French and European corporations that are equally lucrative. According to the French daily *Le Monde*, these include: a contract for Thales and Dassault towards updating 51 Mirage fighter planes, worth a rosy 1.5 billion Euro; a contract for Europe's main missile manufacturer MBDA, towards construction of ground-to-air missiles; *plus* a contract for the building of two civilian nuclear reactors near the densely populated city of Bombay, by the well known French nuclear company Areva (2).

Delhi's season of foreign military and nuclear orders even at first glance appears quite unprecedented. Yet it would be patently wrong to leave it at this, and fail to notice other peculiar coincidences. Historically, as stated above, the Indian state maintained intimate relations with Russia's precursor, the USSR. Yet the above-described military and nuclear deals, both with Russia and with Russia's former adversaries, the US and France, are best understood against the background of changed relationships between India and the United States. In July of 2005, the then US President George W Bush and India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh signed a framework-agreement for nuclear cooperation. The deal brought to an end the West's previous attempts to stem India's rise as an atomic world power.

Officially, the aim of the new deal was to help India expand its production of nuclear energy, through promotion of the country's access to uranium and to international civilian nuclear technology. Indian newspapers in 2008 speculated that the size of business to be generated through the deal for Indian and foreign enterprises totalled 40 billion dollars. Yet when the nuclear deal was being prepared, it was severely criticised by the Indian government's leftwing allies and by leading Indian peace activists. They emphasised that the controversial deal would legitimise India's status as nuclear weapons' state, and that not all of India's 'civilian' reactors would be put under

an international inspection regime. India, Indian critics argued, will be able to manufacture an *extra* one hundred nuclear bombs at least.

Yet, while public controversies in India have rightly highlighted the dubious implications of the deal for India's status as military-nuclear world power, Indian newspapers in the wake of the signing of the deal also pinpointed other, equally dramatic implications of the agreement. Coincidentally, I happened to be teaching at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi in September of 2008. At the time, outstanding issues towards consolidation of the nuclear deal had just been cleared by the American and Indian governments. Reading leading Indian dailies, I was stunned by speculation about expansion in exports of US *armaments* to India thanks to the nuclear agreement.

In an article that appeared in *The Times of India* for instance, figures were cited for the size of money India had spent on international arms' orders since the Kargil conflict (25 billion dollars), and was 'poised' to spend on arms purchases over the next five to six years (another 30 billion). Arms exports, it was argued, were the US's added objective (3). One deal for the sale of weaponry that had already been clinched—described as India's biggest ever with the US—was one whereby US giant Boeing would supply the Indian air force with eight reconnaissance aircraft. When Obama visited Delhi in November last, further defence contracts were mentioned as having meanwhile been concluded with three US corporations, i.e. Boeing, Lockheed Martin and GE Aviation. According to American sources cited in the Delhi press, US companies had 'bagged' *forty* percent of military-commercial contracts signed by India recently!

Clearly, the deals that have been clinched with the American, French and Russian salesmen-presidents who were in Delhi in November and December—read conjointly—do confirm that the US-India nuclear deal had a *reverse* side. It did not just target expansion of India's production of nuclear energy. In fact, the deal has both legitimised India's status as a nuclear weapons state, threatening to enhance the danger of nuclear conflagration in the Indo-Pak subcontinent, and has legitimised a new approach of the Delhi government towards handling its international military-commercial relationships.

In the era of the Cold War, the Indian government needed to walk a tightrope whenever it bought foreign arms. It had to ever weight and balance, eager as it was to maintain privileged military relations with the Soviet Union, and desirous as it also was to buy weaponry from

the West, i.e. from European arms suppliers. Now, after conclusion of the controversial nuclear deal with the US, India has to continue its balancing act between competing sales interests of foreign suppliers, to an extent. Yet the nuclear deal, as the state-visits amply testify, has allowed India to re--strategise its military relations with other world powers. The deal not only legitimises India's status as an atomic weapons state. It also gives it a free hand towards buying from or co-constructing advanced weaponry with the US. Thanks to the US-India nuclear deal, and, one may add, Obama's loyal follow-up to Bush Jr's policymaking, India has become a full-fledged, a truly adult participant in the militarisation of the world economy.

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Notes:

- (1) For a comprehensive study of the economics of nuclear and military production see Peter Custers (2007) **Questioning Globalised Militarism: Nuclear and Military Production and Critical Economic Theory**, Tulika Books, New Delhi.
- (2) For the report on President Sarkozy's visit to Delhi and for further details on the deals signed between India and France, see **Le Monde**, December 7, 2010, p.6: '*La France Annonce Une Serie d'Accords en Inde*'.
- (3) For Custers' analysis of the US-India deal, see for instance Peter Custers (2009) 'A Different Perspective on the US-India Nuclear Deal', **Monthly Review**, New York., USA, Vol.61, No.4, September 2009, p.19.

NDMLP Diary

NDMLP Statement to the Media

18th February 2011

Fishery Issues in Palk Strait

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party, on behalf of the Politburo of the Party, issued the following statement on the aggravation of the disputes between the fisher folk of Sri Lanka and India.

Shooting to death or attacking and torturing of Indian fisher folk in Sri Lanka's waters is unacceptable under any condition. Continuing torture of the fisher folk, who are ordinary toiling people, should be strongly condemned. Such incidents should be stopped forthwith. At the same time, it is not permissible for Indian fishing trawlers to intrude unlawfully into Sri Lankan territorial waters and, especially, to make off with vast quantities of the marine resources of the North. Owing to such incidents, it is the fisher folk, who are ordinary toiling people of the two countries, who are being severely affected. Hence the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party insists that the governments of Sri Lanka and India should, without ulterior motive, conduct negotiations to resolve the persevering problem affecting the fisher folk of the two countries.

The statement further added that Indian fisher folk have for long been subject to killing, arrest and attack in Sri Lankan waters. At the same time, the fisher folk of the North have for long suffered a ban on fishing and harassment that have prevented them from earning a livelihood from their marine territory. They have also from time to time suffered loss of life, disappearance and arrest. The war in Sri Lanka was a major reason for these phenomena. Now, even after the end of the war, the fisher folk of both countries continue to face various problems as before.

Indian fisher folk have been killed in Sri Lankan waters in recent months. Also, Indian fisher folk have crossed the marine boundary in fishing trawlers to catch large quantities of fish. The fisher folk of the North have frequently charged that, large scale fishing by trawlers, besides its direct impact, also depletes fish resources. At the forefront of trawler fishing are big capitalists of Tamilnadu. Those who are badly affected are the fisher folk, who are ordinary toiling people. Hence it is necessary to emphasise that attempts to cross the maritime boundary and fish in the seas of northern Sri Lanka should be stopped.

Every electoral political party of Tamilnadu is capitalising on the sorrows of the affected Indian fisher folk. Yet others are whipping up narrow Tamil nationalist fervour in the name of Tamil sentiment. Meantime, the Central Government of India, in its hegemonic interest, and the Government of Sri Lanka, from its chauvinistic standpoint, seek to take advantage of the problem of the fisher folk. The reality is that the fisher folk comprising ordinary toiling people are adversely affected as a result in several ways. The governments of Sri Lanka and India should immediately begin talks to avert such adverse effects. The Party emphasises that solutions should be found which will not hurt in any way the fisher folk of Tamilnadu in India and the northern region of Sri Lanka.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

NDMLP Statement to the Media
1st February 2011

Arson Attack against Lanka-e-News

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party in his statement condemning the arson attack on the office of the Internet magazine Lanka-e-News said that, the arson attack on the office of the Internet magazine Lanka-e-News is a measure of the anti-democratic extent to which freedom of opinion and media freedom are restricted in Sri Lanka; and that the attack appears to be premeditated. Not only has a threat been made to all media through it but also a signal that the kind of attacks that were carried out against the media in the past will continue in the future. The New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party strongly denounces this act of arson.

The statement further added that the past thirty year period of war had been a dark period for the media and media personnel. The continuing attacks on the media illustrates that, twenty months since the end of the war, the situation has not changed. Continuous threats have been issued in the past against the Internet magazine Lanka-e-News. Its editor-in-chief having sought asylum in Europe and one of its journalists going missing confirm that the arson attack on the office of the Internet journal was a premeditated attack.

Hence, the Party emphasises that it will be the people who need to respond to such continuing attacks on the media and media personnel.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

NDMLP Statement to the Media

29th January 2011

The NDMLP in Local Elections

The New Democratic Marxist Leninist Party Contests Local Elections in the Hill Country but Not in the North

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party stated that the Party will be contesting the forthcoming elections to three Pradeshiya Sabhas (Regional Councils) in the Hill Country as an independent group under the symbol of 'kettle'. In the Nuwara Eliya District, the Party is contesting Walapana Regional Council under the leadership of Comrade S Panneerselvam, former Regional Council Member, Nuwara Eliya Regional Council under the leadership Comrade ACR John, and Haputale Regional Council under the leadership Comrade DM Prabakar. Although nominations were submitted to the Ukuwela Regional Council by an independent group led by the Party, the nominations were rejected.

Although arrangements had been made by the Party to contest five Regional Councils in the Districts of Jaffna and Vavunia, the Party, at the last moment, decided against contesting in view of the deterioration of the climate for normal life owing to fear among the people owing to the continuation of murder, robbery and abduction in the North.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

NDMLP Statement to the Media

17th December 2011

National Anthem in Sinhala Only

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party made the following statement on behalf of the Politburo of the Party condemning the recent Cabinet resolution on the singing of national anthem.

The recent Cabinet decision that the national anthem shall be sung only in Sinhala and not in Tamil is an expression of the chauvinistic stand of the President and the Government. As a result of it, bitterness will grow between nationalities and a climate of ethnic confrontation will be created. Hence the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party strongly

denounces the above resolution and urges the government to abandon that resolution.

The statement added that it is the chauvinistic decisions and actions in the name of the majority under parliamentary and executive presidential rules that have been the basis for the sorry situation of the country today. It is as a result of it that the national question persists as the main contradiction. It is deplorable that the President and the Government, who in these circumstances, should put forward a just political solution and establish understanding, unity and peace among the nationalities, have decided, based entirely on chauvinistic grounds, to have the national anthem sung in Sinhala alone. Such cheap chauvinistic resolutions will only serve to divert the attention of the Sinhalese people from the enormous economic problems facing them. Besides, a stage is set to incite hostile feelings of narrow nationalism among the Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim and Hill Country Tamil working people who need to be united. It must be concluded that the resolution on the national anthem was taken as a means of thus dividing the people of the working classes in order to prolong chauvinistic capitalist rule and authority.

SK Senthivel
General Secretary

Anti-Imperialism Day Addresses

Comrade Senthivel in Jaffna on Tamil Rights and Imperialism

Comrade SK Senthivel, General Secretary of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party who was the Chief Guest on the occasion of events organised by the International Solidarity Organisation in Jaffna to mark Anti-Imperialism Day and the 52nd National Day of Cuba. Comrade Senthivel addressed the meeting held at the Auditorium of the Jaffna Multi Purpose Co-operative Society, Jaffna, on the theme "Let us awaken against the effects of imperialist globalisation". The meeting was chaired by Comrade KA Seevaratnam. The following is a slightly abridged text of the speech by Comrade Senthivel:

Tamils cannot win any of their rights by compromising with imperialism; and it was Tamil nationalism that went into partnership with imperialism that dragged the Tamil people as far as Mullivaikkaal and to tragic disaster.

This is the first time in many years that Anti-Imperialism Day has been celebrated in Jaffna. Leftists have opposed imperialism from the time of the founding of the left movement in Sri Lanka. When the left movement commenced as the Lanka Sama Samaja Party in December 1935, it included a wide cross section of the left. It is true that in course of time there had been several setbacks, weaknesses and deviations. Yet, those who adhered to genuine Marxist Leninist policies are clear in their thinking. Today the world is witnessing wave upon wave of anti-imperialist protest.

US imperialism remains the central body that tutors local and global capitalists on methods of exploiting the poor and raking in profit by the billion. The World Bank and the IMF are fulfilling their tasks in the interest of imperialism to exploit poor countries and plunder their resources. Capitalism has introduced a culture of import consumerism. These capitalists do not think in terms of local production of consumer goods. Even when they do so, it is driven by profit motive. It was profit-driven imperialist capitalist multinational organisations that got the producers of vegetable crops to agrochemicals.

US imperialism, in order to plunder the oil resources of Iraq, had amassed 140,000 troops there, killed people by the hundreds of thousands and made rivers of blood flow in that country.

The JR Jayawardane government which came to power in 1977 introduced the open economic policy that favoured imperialism. In order to prevent an anti-imperialist upsurge among the Sinhalese, it escalated the national contradiction from a low to high level. It acted according to the advice of the World Bank and the IMF and, when government employees opposed it and went on strike demanding a wage increase to meet the consequent rise in cost of living, it dismissed 80,000 government employees. It was the forces of imperialism that were behind this at the time; and it is the very same forces that are showing the way for the government to deny a wage rise to government and private sector employees.

The 30 year history of the liberation struggle of the Tamil nationality has witnessed the killing of 300,000 Tamil people. It is imprudent to expect that the Tamil people can win their rights and liberation with the help of imperialism. Likewise, to await the guidance and advice of India, which is a regional hegemonic power, is an unwise and reactionary stand. Hence, the Tamil people and other minority nationalities should unite with the Sinhalese working masses to mobilise in an anti-imperialist front. It is through that the Tamil

people could confront the chauvinistic capitalist ruling class that continues to oppress them.

Today marks Cuba's liberation. Fifty two years ago the people of Cuba, led by Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and others, struggled and won their rights. Since then the people of Cuba have persevered in struggle against US imperialism. Meantime, they are developing socialist structures amid many challenges and meeting the basic needs of the people. There are carrying out educational, health and social welfare schemes. Cuba's tallest building is the government general hospital building. In imperialist countries it will be a building associated with private profit like the international trade centre.

Cuba developed a bacterial bio-insecticide to stop the propagation of mosquitoes spreading the dengue. The Sri Lankan government was half hearted about introducing the product since commissions earned through the marketing of mosquito coils would be lost.

For fifty years, the US imposed a trade embargo to block the export of sugar and other products from Cuba. Yet the heroic people of Cuba and their leader Fidel Castro have, through struggling boldly against US imperialism, set a great example for all of us. It is the duty of the Tamil people as well as all other nationalities of Sri Lanka to carry out broad-based struggles against imperialism.

Comrades S Sivapalan, K Thanikasalam, K Sivarasa, T Prakash also addressed the meeting. Comrade K Kathigamanathan delivered the vote of thanks.

Comrade Thambiah in Colombo on International Anti-Imperialist Initiatives

Comrade E Thambiah, International Organiser of the New-Democratic Marxist-Leninist Party declared, "Let us awaken against the effects of imperialist globalisation!" when he addressed the meeting organised by the International People's Solidarity Forum in Colombo to mark Anti-Imperialism Day and 52nd National Day of Cuba gathering at the Professor Kailasapathy Auditorium of the Deshiya Kalai Ilakiyap Peravai in Colombo-06 on 1st of January 2011,. The meeting was chaired by Comrade S Krishnapriyan. Comrade Thambiah in his address titled "Imperialist Globalisation and Internationalism" emphasised that the initiative is again shifting to the left forces in struggles against human rights violations and national oppression, campaigns for women's rights and environmental protection among other matters. The following text summarises his address.

International movements against Imperialism have passed the stage of being restricted to dialogues on theoretical issues and are now actively involved in joint activities. Comrade Thambiah shared his experiences at the 6th International Conference against Disappearances organised by the International Committee against Disappearances and held successfully in London last December, with 130 representatives from 26 Countries. Among the participants were representatives from communist parties, left parties, national liberation movements, who participated with interest and reserving their differences. Likewise, after long years, communist parties, international and regional alliances of communist parties and anti-imperialist movements with all their differences, have resolved to get together in the forthcoming International Conference of the International Co-ordinating Committee against Imperialism to be held in collaboration with United Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) in Kathmandu in December 2011. It is certain to create a healthy atmosphere for different communist parties and alliances on common understanding after 3rd International.

He also added that the Association for Proletarian Solidarity (Italy) will conduct by June 2011 its international sharing in order to plan collective activities against the so called 'Green Revolution' of imperialism and pointed out that the trends encourage worldwide activities to overthrow Imperialism."

Comrade Thambiah added that unlike in the past, we now witness the common understanding between the communist movements and national liberation movements. They have found common ground against imperialism and are working together.

Human rights campaigns, movements for environment protection, women liberation movements and other campaigns are now slipping out of the hands of non-governmental organisations which have basically functioned according to imperialist agendas. Movements for these causes are now marching forward independently and out of reach of NGO clutches.

The meeting was also addressed by SP Gopinath speaking on "Imperialist Globalisation and the National Question", ACR John speaking on "Imperialist Globalisation and Workers' Rights" and J Satgurunathan speaking on "Imperialist Globalisation and Culture".

The meeting was followed by an evening of cultural events.

Sri Lankan Events

Renewed Lawlessness in the North

Almost two years since the end of the war, anti-social violence is on the rise in the Jaffna Peninsula. Robberies, abductions and arbitrary killings have become daily events. Interestingly it was Minister Douglas Devananda of the EPDP, a partner in the government who made a public complaint about the state of lawlessness in Jaffna.

With the guns of the LTEE silenced, at least for now, what could be the source of violence against the public which the government cannot control?

Another Vicious Attack on Media

The arson attack on the office of Lanka-e-News is a reminder that it is not necessary that a news medium is popular or influential to be the target of pro-government goons. The Internet magazine Lanka-e-News has faced repeated threats about publishing stories critical of the government, and its editor-in-chief sought asylum in Europe and one of its journalists, Ekneligoda, went missing. The arson attack is the latest episode in the sorry story of attacks on the media.

Media Representation

The Maharaja Organisation, a major capitalist venture in Sri Lanka, owns a powerful electronic medium (MTV) as well. It has made no secret of its political ambitions. Some years ago, it went out of its way to abuse its position as a news medium to promote and protect former MP Milinda Moragoda. It also made a TV personality of J Sri Ranga, a rather mediocre journalist, by making him presenter of a political chat show, the only one of its kind in Tamil; and, foreseeing the political demise of Moragoda, it ensured that Sri Ranga was elected to Parliament on a UNP ticket last year from the Hill Country. Now the MTV plant in parliament is being promoted as a major (pro-government) Tamil leader in the North, to the annoyance of pro-government Tamil political parties. He also enjoys disproportionately and irritatingly long airtime on all MTV news broadcasts.

The MTV, once noted for its pro-UNP bias, was quick to switch loyalty to President Mahinda Rajapaksa on his election for a second term. Of late, the MTV has been actively involved in undermining the leader of the UNP, to the relief of some of its former targets, now in the ranks of the government. Whether the aim is merely to promote one of its clients to that position or something more sinister remains to be seen.

Trespassing at Sea and on Land

The fishermen of the Jaffna peninsula arrested Indian fishermen who had entered Sri Lankan waters to fish near the Sri Lankan coast. The captors treated the captives kindly and handed them over to the police. The intruders were remanded on court order. Several people, including a judge who ordered police custody, have complained about meddling by the Indian Deputy High Commissioner in Jaffna, who has denied the charge. The detainees as well as their boats were, however, soon released by the Sri Lankan government. But several Sri Lankan fishermen arrested by the coastal police in South India are lingering in prison for long periods and some who were released recently complained that the Sri Lankan diplomats had done nothing to secure their release.

Following the release of the detainees, fishermen from Jaffna, displaying fishing nets damaged by Indian trawlers, demonstrated opposite the Deputy High Commission in Jaffna (opened only two months ago) protesting against unlawful fishing and Indian meddling.

Insulting the Dead

The desecration of the cremated remains of Parvathippillai, mother of the late LTTE leader Pirapakaran, is a despicable act of the politically bankrupt, and also perhaps a measure of the depths to which political civilisation has sunk in this country.

Parvathippillai was not even a member of the LTTE and lived in India as a refugee for a long time, and she was treated cruelly by the Government of the State of Tamilnadu which blocked her entry to India for medical treatment an year ago. At the same time attempts were made to gain political mileage of her sad plight. That is the degree of desperation of electoral politics in Tamilnadu. With the State Assembly elections approaching, politicians of various shades have now sought to make capital of her death as well.

Book Review

Antonio A Santucci. *Antonio Gramsci*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 2010, pp 207. US \$15.95 (paperback).

Of utterances by leading Marxist thinkers, those of Antonio Gramsci are perhaps the most systematically abused in recent times, mainly by NGOs with an anti-Marxist agenda. This highly commendable book on the works of Gramsci by Antonio A Santucci (1949-2004), a preeminent Gramsci scholar, is a most welcome arrival.

The book has a short preface by Eric Hobsbawm and a foreword by Joseph A Buttigieg followed by the editor's note by Lelio La Porta.

The book places in political context the works of Gramsci, and emphasises the importance of understanding Gramsci's methods to appreciate what he had in mind. Buttigieg usefully draws attention to "Gramsci's unwavering focus on the specific and the particular and his constant yearning to be in close touch with the reality of individual existence" as a distinctive aspect of his life and work: namely the inseparability of his theoretical work from his political activity". He also warns against the tendency for some to separate Gramsci's pre-prison writing from his incomplete major work, *Prison Notebooks*. Elsewhere Buttigieg has warned that Gramsci's own philological rigour had not protected his text from distortion by careless and incompetent readers as well as by those with a will to deceive.

Santucci warns the reader about the misuse of the terms "civil society" and "hegemony" which have been appropriated by 'radicals' and conservatives to serve ends that have nothing to do with Gramsci's purpose in developing them.

The book goes into considerable detail about how Gramsci advanced the Leninist notion of "hegemony" to provide a deeper understanding of where the power of the ruling class rests. The lack of importance given to the term "civil society" in the book is consistent with Gramsci's position that the "civil society" was no alternative to "political society" or something that stood apart from the latter.

The book makes a very valuable contribution to the understanding of Gramsci's life and works as well as the political milieu in which Gramsci was able to develop thoughts that addressed the specific while possessing universal meaning.

-SJS-

World Events

AFRICA

Tunisia: Spark that Lit the Wildfire

The Tunisian uprising which achieved almost instant success in driving out Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, the corrupt leader of the dictatorial regime did not stop at that. For more than a month after the departure of Ben Ali, the country is still facing strikes and popular unrest. Calls are growing for the constitution to be re-written and for preparing the ground for democratic elections. The uprising has been clear from the outset that a total break with the old regime was necessary; and protests and agitations are likely to continue to defend the democratic agenda of the uprising against subversion by the forces of reaction well entrenched in the state machinery.

The US, for its part, quickly sized up the groundswell of protest. In an effort to turn the event to its advantage, it sent Jeffrey Feltman, top US envoy for the Middle East, to Tunisia soon after Ben Ali was ousted. Feltman met with Tunisian ministers and civil society figures, and promptly called for reforms and free and fair elections. He even prescribed the Tunisian example to other Arab governments, giving the impression that the US is leading international support for a new Tunisia, to the detriment of its former colonial power, France.

Significantly, the Tunisian left, although not strong, had considerable say in guiding the direction of the uprising as well as in upholding the democratic agenda. Tunisia's political police detained Hamma Hammami, spokesperson of the Communist Party of Tunisian Workers (PCOT) a day after the appeal by the PCOT to the Tunisian people and democratic forces, encouraging them to join the ranks around a common alternative to the despotic regime, calling for "departure of Ben Ali, the dissolution of institutions puppet the current regime and the establishment of an interim national government in charge of organising free and transparent elections". The PCOT in its statement of 12th April [See 21stcenturymanifesto.wordpress.com/2011/01/14/tunisian-communist-leaders-arrested/] called for elections to a constituent assembly for drafting a new constitution to lay the groundwork for a truly democratic republic, embodying the sovereignty of the people, that guarantees respect for human rights, equality and dignity. It also declared that

arrests will not deter the party from fulfilling its responsibilities towards the people in their struggle against the dictatorship.

Another positive outcome has been the formation of the “14th of January Front”, a progressive alliance comprising the League of the Labour Left, Movement of Nasserist Unionists, Movement of Democratic Nationalists, Democratic Nationalists (Al-Watad), Baasist Current, Independent Left, the Tunisian Communist Workers Party, and the Patriotic and Democratic Labour Party. The aims are to remove all traces of the corrupt regime led by Ben Ali, to democratise Tunis at every level, and to address pressing issues including compensation to victims of the Ben Ali regime, punishing serious anti-people offences, building a national economy and resolving problems of unemployment and low wages. It also has a clear anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist agenda.

[Sources: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=22993;mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2011/tunisia250111.html>]

Egypt: Subverting People’s Victory

James Petras neatly summed up the developments in Egypt in the first few sentences of his article “Egypt: Social Movements, the CIA and Mossad” (www.informationclearinghouse.info/article27494.htm): *The mass movements which forced the removal of Mubarak reveal both the strength and weaknesses of spontaneous uprisings. On the one hand, the social movements demonstrated their capacity to mobilise hundreds of thousands, if not millions, in a successful sustained struggle culminating in the overthrow of the dictator in a way that pre-existent opposition parties and personalities were unable or unwilling to do.*

On the other hand, lacking any national political leadership, the movements were not able to take political power and realise their demands, allowing the Mubarak military high command to seize power and define the “post-Mubarak” process, ensuring the continuation of Egypt’s subordination to the US, the protection of the illicit wealth of the Mubarak clan (\$70 billion), and the military elite’s numerous corporations and the protection of the upper class.

Perhaps, the uprising has already achieved what it could. But what matters most is that, regardless of the outcome, it has negated the claim of imperialism and its lackeys that the people can no more be mobilised to overthrow a government. It has laid bare the postmodernist lie that the mega-narrative has no future role in society. It has shown that globalisation has not led to the “end of history” or “end of politics”.

The uprising was spontaneous —despite the vastly exaggerated credit given to Facebook and Twitter groups for mobilising and coordinating it— and was inspired by events in Tunisia. Disillusioned urban youth aroused the people across the country.

Anyone unfamiliar with events in Egypt in the past few years may be tempted to think that the Mubarak's departure was unexpected. But US policymakers and the top guns of the Egyptian Army who run Egypt expected it. US imperialism, which is adept at running with the hare and chasing with the hound, had its options ready: No matter who replaces Mubarak, the Egyptian Army would control the country.

The US seems to have been prepared. What it did not expect perhaps was the timing and the scale of the mass upsurge. As pointed out by Michel Chossudovsky in his article "The Protest Movement in Egypt: 'Dictators' do not Dictate, They Obey Orders" in *Global Research*, Mubarak's removal was on the US agenda for several years, and the US contemplated a regime replacement that ensured continuity, but with the illusion of meaningful political change. Thus the perceived 'neutrality' of the army helped to ensure that the "regime change" will really be no regime change. The timing of Mubarak's resignation (or removal) was optimised too: a prolonged standoff could tire out and divide the opposition, and buy time to work out details of succession; but it risked the emergence of a coherent movement for genuine change.

The US agenda for Egypt was to hijack the protest movement and replace Mubarak with another puppet head of state who would uphold the neoliberal economic agenda and sustain the interests of foreign powers. Such a regime change does not require an authoritarian military ruler and is attainable by co-opting political parties (including the 'left'), financing civil society groups, infiltrating the protest movement and manipulating national elections. BBC News World (Middle East) on 29th January reported citing Egyptian internet messages that "the US has been sending money to pro-democracy groups". *The Daily Telegraph* of 29th January reported US backing for the April 6 Youth Movement.

The US had talent-spotted Mohamed el-Bareidi, the Nobel Peace laureate, two years ago as a pliable 'democratic' alternative to Mubarak, in case of transition by electoral process, but el-Bareidi does not count for very much in Egyptian politics. The US has adequate access and resources to find other "moderate" options with better mass appeal; and a deal with the Muslim Brotherhood cannot be ruled out.

Thus, what brought the 18 day standoff to an end was a military coup. The understandable elation of the people celebrating their victory will last until for a while, until reality dawns on them. The army and its strategic allies, namely the Egyptian economic elite, US imperialists and Zionists should be pleased about the "happy ending": and Western imperialism

and Israel will now openly rejoice the “historic revolution” and the “a peaceful transfer of power” that will leave the repressive dictatorial state machine unscathed and in their control.

The main challenges facing the Egyptian army and its allies in returning to business as usual are (1) harnessing the democratic momentum and bring it to stagnation to prevent radicalisation especially by the enthusiasm of the youth, and (2) controlling the potentially hostile Muslim nationalist and revolutionary forces.

The army could make cosmetic changes in the power structure, relax a few emergency laws, and hold elections in a way that “moderates” could win. That will help business as usual. But, given the scale of corruption at the top, the army may not gamble on an unknown moderate and even less a clean government. Thus the prospects for the promised fair and free elections and democratic change are poor for fear of letting “radical forces” into power.

Given recent developments in Lebanon and pro-US Turkey, manipulating elections to keep out the radicals and let in moderates is risky too. Also, pro-Palestinian politics based on Arab/Islamic identity and pledges of social justice could produce an undesirable winner; and meddling with free election could risk an uprising which may lead to revolution, unless it is an even more repressive military regime.

A safer imperialist strategy will be to divide the opposition using monetary and strategic support to rival client groups to encourage “democratic rivalry”. The US already has institutions dedicated to that purpose. (Freedom House, which is already at work in Egypt, and National Endowment for Democracy have direct links to the US government and the CIA). Monetary inducements could magically transform politicians into “moderates”, and create divisions, infighting, and mistrust, and, in the end, the legitimacy of an election that produces results unacceptable to the US will be questionable.

It should be noted that the uprising had no political programme, which may be explained by its spontaneity; but no anti-US or anti-Israeli slogan either, despite mass sympathy for the Palestinians. Yet, it is heartening is that the protests and strikes go on amid celebrations, and that the people remain suspicious of the sops thrown at them. It may be a while before people organise themselves to liberate Egypt.

[Sources: www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=22993; www.truth-out.org/egyptian-government-figures-join-protesters67470; zeroanthropology.net/2011/02/11/egypt-and-the-clinton-doctrine/]

Other Surging Protests

Algeria: Civil war erupted in Algeria in 1992 after the military-backed government nullified elections when the voting pattern indicated that a radical Islamic party was poised to win. An estimated 150 000 people or more have since been were killed in that civil war. Although the state consolidated its position following its troops inflicting heavy losses on rebel groups during the civil war, rebel attacks had revived since 2006, with the al-Qaeda playing a major role in the resistance.

The protests in January were an extension of a series of protests in 2010 involving mainly economic issues. The Tunisian outcome certainly encouraged the protesters and the demands concern political freedoms. As the protests gathered momentum, President Abdelaziz Bouteflika offered some concessions relating to political freedom, including the lifting of the state of emergency, but without committing to a deadline. The protests continue without let up.

A number of left-wing opposition parties, announced on 21st January the formation of the National Coordination for Change and Democracy (CNCD) demanding systemic change in Algeria and have called for nationwide marches, starting 9th February. Although the government is far from falling, the protest movement is gathering strength so that the government is likely to be forced to climb down before long.

[Source: *english.aljazeera.net*]

Libya: By early 1990s, President Muammer al-Qaddhafi had compromised with imperialism, and ceased to be the sworn enemy of US imperialism that he was in the 1970s and 1980s. Yet his regime has been treated with suspicion by the US. Protests in Libya followed the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. Initially they had modest support, and gathered momentum when the state and supporters of the Qaddhafi violently over-reacted and killed protesters. The protests spread fast and, by late February, Qaddhafi resorted to brutal land and air attacks on protesters. He has since badly isolated himself politically amid growing turmoil in Libya, which has diverted media attention from the continuing working class resistance in Egypt.

What awaits Libya in the event of Qaddhafi's fall is uncertain. In a country with a parliament but no political parties, one wonders why the initiators of protest chose the flag of the Kingdom of Libya (replaced by a republic in 1969) as a symbol of protest. Meantime, the US is at work to ensure a succession acceptable to it; the people may have other ideas.

[Source: *english.aljazeera.net*]

Djibouti: On 17th February, Djibouti, with a large French military contingent and the only US military base in sub-Saharan Africa, joined the ranks of Arab countries in which popular protests have flared against autocratic rule. Thousands of opposition supporters, mainly students, gathered in Djibouti to demand President Ismael Omar Guelleh's resignation before he seeks re-election for a third term in April. The police used teargas and rubber bullets to disperse them, but the protests continued into Saturday 19th.

[Source: *english.aljazeera.net*]

Sudan: Balkanisation on the Cards?

Contrary to speculation in the West, the much vilified regime of Omar al-Bashir in Sudan accepted in good spirit the result of the referendum on the secession of South Sudan, which passed without incident, but for some clashes in the south involving the security forces. While the acceptance of the 98.83% 'Yes' vote by al-Bashir augers well for future relations between Sudan and the new state, US imperialism will not stop meddling since Chinese influence in the region is likely to grow.

While the human rights record of al-Bashir leaves much to be desired, the human rights crisis in Sudan is a consequence of persistent foreign meddling, mainly by the US and Israel. Israel has heavily armed the rebel Justice and Equality Movement in Darfur, among others, and is playing host to secessionists in South Sudan and Darfur. It used the conflict between Chad and Sudan to meddle in Sudan and promote civil war in Darfur. Although Chad and Sudan, which broke off diplomatic ties earlier in 2010, accusing each other of supporting rebel assaults on their capitals, have restored relations in November, the relationship remains tense. Weakening Sudan has been an Israeli project since Sudan declared support for the Palestinian cause, and attempts to carve out an independent state of Darfur are unlikely to cease in a hurry.

[Source: <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=12156>]

ASIA

The Middle East: Gathering Storm

Events in Tunisia and, more importantly, Egypt had an impact on many but not all states in the Middle East with repressive regimes. Not all are clients of US imperialism and not all are entirely unpopular. But, without

exception, the state, in each case, has been harsh on the protesters. Regime change by mass rebellion seems less likely in countries like Iran and Syria, where the West desires it, than in Yemen and Bahrain, where it does not. The jubilation with which the departure of Mubarak was received in Gaza as well as in many parts of Lebanon seems most symbolic of the anti-imperialist essence of the uprisings.

Bahrain: Bahrain's Saudi-backed Sunni ruler, King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa, has long oppressed the majority Shi'a population. (See <http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2010/09/09/bahrain>). There is, however, no Sunni-Shi'a conflict among the people. The ruling party, to avert a loss of grip on power, arrested hundreds of Shi'a activists and clamped down on the communication facilities of the opposition party just before the parliamentary election.

Following the uprisings in North Africa, the King, fearing for his rule, ordered several welfare measures and hinted at further concessions. But that did not stop protests starting on 14th February demanding, among other things, constitutional reforms and an end to discrimination against Shi'a Muslims. The harsh response of the armed police further aggravated tension, and the opposition groups refused to negotiate with the King until tanks were off the streets and the army stopped attacks on the protesters. On 19th February, the government yielded amid jubilation of the protesters.

[Additional source: www.presstv.ir]

Jordan: Protests concerning economic issues began on a modest scale on 7th January. King Abdullah, fearing a Tunisian-style revolution, dismissed his government on 1st February and appointed a new Prime Minister. But growing protests are rocking Jordan, indicating that the concessions are inadequate. President Obama sent Mike Mullen, Head of Joint Chiefs of Staff, to meet the king on 13th February, and the US embassy in Amman reiterated US support to the ruler. The situation has turned violent, however, since the state unleashed its baton wielding supporters on the protesters on 18th February. While the overthrow of the king is unlikely in the near future, the government will face increasing pressure over its conciliatory policy towards Israel.

[Sources: www.israeltoday.co.il, english.aljazeera.net]

Yemen: On 27th January 2011, 16 000 protestors took part in protests in the capital Sana'a and other regions to demand a change in government. On 2nd February the unelected president Ali Abdullah Saleh, a close ally of the US and in power for 32 years, promised to step down in

2013. But the protests continued and on 11th February, thousands of pro-regime demonstrators attacked anti-government demonstrators with clubs and knives— an eerie parallel to an Egyptian tactic that failed to quell protests and destroyed the regime’s public reputation. The protests have only got stronger by the day and police shooting at the protesters has further aggravated the crisis for Saleh.

[Source: www.newsyemen.net, topics.nytimes.com]

Syria: Early in February, protesters planned a “day of rage” to vent their grievances against President Bashar al-Assad. The protesters were only few in number, but the government deployed security services in strength across the country. The protestors dispersed three hours later. The protests were more against police brutality than against the government, whose downfall was not demanded by the demonstrators. A “Facebook” campaign for a Syrian ‘Day of Rage’ failed to materialise.

[Sources: newsfromsyria.com, english.aljazeera.net]

Iraq: Violent protests occurred across Iraq, with anti-government protesters rallying against corruption, poor basic services and high unemployment. In Basra, the second largest city, about 1000 people rallied on 18th February demanding better service from the government, jobs and improved pensions. They also called for the provincial governor to resign. Protests also occurred in the autonomous Kurdish region of northern Iraq, with more economic prosperity than other parts of the country. The protests have, however, not been strong enough to reflect a mass desire for regime change among a population which is struggling to be rid of US imperialist domination with a lingering presence of 50 000 US troops.

[Source: english.aljazeera.net]

Kuwait: In oil-rich Kuwait, sandwiched between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, The stateless people, long-time residents of Kuwait known as Bedouin, are demanding benefits available to Kuwaiti nationals— free education, free health care and jobs, as well as citizenship. More than 1,000 stateless people protested, on 18th February, and dozens were arrested by police. Security forces aggressively dispersed the demonstration, using smoke bombs and water cannon, after protesters ignored warnings to leave.

[Source: english.aljazeera.net]

Iran: Demonstrations in Iran revived US hopes of mass mobilisation against the 'unfriendly' regime. But the New York Times noted that the size of the protests in Iran was unclear, although its reporters suggested without much evidence that perhaps 20 000 to 30 000 demonstrators took to the streets in several cities defying strong warnings. The protests were, certainly not a patch on the well orchestrated protests against the election of Ahmedinejad as president in 2009.

The Iranian government has, no doubt, been hard on the opposition, with the supporters of the regime demanding the death sentence to leaders who incited the protests. The protest movement, however, showed no signs of making headway despite a few thousand strong demonstration in Teheran in mid-February against the killing of a protester. The state and the media in the US will try their best to exaggerate events in Iran, not realising that support from the US is a liability among the masses in Iran.

[Source: *The Guardian*]

Afghanistan: Strategic Stalemate?

David Wood, Chief Military Correspondent to Politics Daily, a website of AOL News, in his article, "The Afghanistan War: Tactical Victories, Strategic Stalemate?" of 13th February 2011, questioned the claims of tactical gains by Gen. David Petraeus, top US commander in Afghanistan. (See www.politicsdaily.com/2011/02/13/the-afghanistan-war-tactical-victories-strategic-stalemate/).

The title of Wood's article was inspired by an essay by Army Col. Harry G Summers Williams called "Tactical Victory, Strategic Defeat" where Summers recalled himself saying to a North Vietnamese officer in Paris only days before US met its defeat in Saigon "You know you never defeated us on the battlefield"; and the North Vietnamese officer responding, "That may be so, but it is also irrelevant". The article contrasted the claims with independent data and analysis to suggest a wide gap between those battlefield gains and the strategic progress needed to convince the US establishment to sustain the war effort for at least three more years.

It rejected claims by Petraeus that Taliban insurgents "are losing momentum in some key areas" and that many are turning to Afghan authorities, since an estimated 7000 insurgents who went over to the government later returned to fighting because of ill-managed and underfunded programs for resettlement and reintegration. It also argued that lavish programs to court Taliban fighters, unless integrated into social, economic and political life, will send disillusioned Taliban fighters

back to fighting, thus contributing to “strategic failure” of the US in Afghanistan. It cited Col. Dan Willaims, Commander of the 4th Infantry Division's Combat Aviation Brigade: “We've made a lot of progress ... a lot of tactical gains.... The question is has that had a strategic... effect?”

Wood contrasted claims by Lt. Gen. David M. Rodriguez at a briefing for Pentagon reporters that the troops are discovering and clearing weapons an increasing number of local arms cache sites owing to more Afghans tipping off U.S. and Afghan troops about them with widespread reports that insurgents actually increased the tempo of fighting and an year-end analysis by the Afghan NGO Safety Office that it found “indisputable evidence that the situation is deteriorating”.

He also contested the claim by Petraeus and others that the higher tempo of fighting is because of increased US attacks on Taliban strongholds, by pointing out that the NGO Safety Office survey found a 64% increase in attacks initiated by insurgents, mostly small arms ambushes. Claims by US commanders about increased number of Afghan soldiers and police being trained were also rebuffed on the basis of failing credibility of the security forces in the eyes of the public.

The claim by Petraeus that the Taliban was on the run, was shown to be hollow against the independent reporting by John McCreary, former senior intelligence watch officer for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, based on unclassified sources, that armed clashes in November were double the previous month's and almost evenly divided between attacks initiated by insurgents and by US and its allies. McCreary also said that the insurgents “displayed a new ability to sustain attacks for a month over a wider area than ever before” and that the number of fighters that they could muster rose from between 10 000 and 15 000 in 2008 to about 25 000 now, which was “a measure of increased popular support”.

McCreary also pointed out that both sides seem unable to turn tactical gains into strategic advantage and that “their achievements never seem worth their costs on the battlefields. They produce a lot more fighting without changing the security situation”. According to him, if the United States maintains its current level of effort, “the security situation should be containable but not permanently improvable, and the government in Kabul will remain dependent on NATO forces for its survival for an indefinite period.

James Clapper, Director of National Intelligence, testifying to the US Congress on 10th February, reportedly pointed out that the US continues to suffer a negative strategic impact, in part because of its involvement in Afghanistan and that that al-Qaeda is able to recruit willing new fighters by exploiting such explosive issues as “the presence of US forces in Afghanistan and Iraq and US support for Israel” all of which “fuel their narrative of a hostile West determined to undermine Islam”.

India: Injustice and Corruption

Unjust Conviction of Dr Binayak Sen

Dr Binayak Sen, a pioneer of health care for marginalised and indigenous communities in the state of Chhattisgarh, where the state police and armed Maoists have been engaged in a prolonged armed conflict, was handed down a life sentence by a court in Chhattisgarh on 24th December 2010. Dr Sen was arrested on 14th May 2007 by the state police on charges of sedition and conspiracy under the Chhattisgarh Special Public Safety Act, 2005, and the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, 2004, and released on bail since May 2009, following countrywide protests. He was taken into custody again, immediately after he was sentenced under laws that are unacceptably vague and fall far short of international standards for criminal prosecution.

The politically motivated conviction is in breach of international norms of fair trial and is bound to arouse feelings in the conflict-affected area. It has been denounced by many human rights activists and reputed personalities at home and abroad who demand that the state and central government authorities should drop forthwith the politically motivated charges against Dr Binayak Sen and release him.

Although the charge was that he had his links with an ailing Maoist ideologue Narayan Sanyal, the real reason was that he exposed unlawful killings of Adivasis by the police and by Salwa Judum, the state-sponsored private militia of goons to fight the Maoists.

The campaign for his release has now developed into a national issue in India as well as an international issue. In February 2011, forty Nobel laureates signed an appeal to Indian authorities calling for his immediate release on bail pending appeal.

Interestingly, although it could very well be a coincidence, of the forty signatories compromising 14 winners of the Chemistry Prize, 8 of the Physics Prize, 13 of the Physiology/Medicine Prize and 5 of the Economic Sciences Prize, there was no Peace Prize winner. That in itself may be a compliment.

Soaring Corruption

Corruption has reached new heights in India since its economy was opened up for foreign investment and made a partner to imperialist globalisation. Five major recent scams are listed below.

Telecom License Scam: The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) in a report released in November 2010 said that India may have lost up to US \$39 billion in revenue—a sum as big as its defence budget—

owing to the Telecom Ministry awarding lucrative licenses and radio spectrum in 2007/08 at below-market prices and in violation of rules to ineligible firms.

Soon after the report, Telecom Minister Andimuthu Raja was forced to resign; and on 2nd February the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) arrested him as well as two of his associates in the ministry. The arrest has embarrassed the DMK, a partner in the ruling Congress-led coalition, facing State Assembly elections in May, and further strained the already shaky DMK-Congress alliance.

The scam is a serious setback for the Congress-led government whose refusal to set up a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) to look into the matter made the opposition prevent Parliament from functioning during the winter session. The main opposition party BJP threatened the same with the impending budget session, unless a JPC is set up. Given recent developments, a government climb down seems imminent.

The report has faulted several companies with international links, and a top lobbyist for companies like Tata and Reliance Industries has been questioned as part of an investigation into possible money laundering and violation of foreign exchange laws when the licenses were purchased. On 9th February the CBI arrested the first company boss –Shahis Balwa of DB Realty– in this connection and on 14th February summoned Unitech chairman-cum-managing director Sanjay Chandra for inquiries.

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh under criticism for delaying permission to charge Raja with corruption has been forced to answer questions from the Supreme Court. There is suspicion among political analysts of the left that Raja has been dumped to let important figures in the ruling party and their business allies escape unscathed.

Another Telecom Scandal. India's space agency is being probed by the CAG for granting without a proper bidding process a lucrative mobile Internet bandwidth to a private firm in 2005, costing the government up to US \$44 billion. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) leased transponders on two of its satellites to a private firm, Devas Multimedia, allowing it access to S-band telecom spectrum, worth billions of dollars to communication providers. S-band spectrum, not yet in extensive use, is potentially valuable in India's rapidly-growing mobile phone market, to provide wireless broadband and other mobile data services. The ISRO has accepted granting Devas improper access to a valuable national resource in a flawed contract and moved to cancel the contract,

Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, who personally oversees the space ministry, denied on 8th February that any revenue had been lost. Although the political fallout may be slow to gather momentum owing to

complexity of the issues, Manmohan Singh has been accused by the opposition of negligence and asked to explain his role.

Loan Bribery Scam. Top officials of Indian banks, lenders and financial firms have been accused of accepting bribes to grant corporate loans. The scam is estimated by local media to involve millions of dollars. In November 2011, the CBI arrested eight persons, including the chief executive of LIC Housing Finance, and senior officials at the state-run Central Bank of India, Punjab National Bank and Bank of India.

The CBI, in papers filed in court, named several leading Indian firms besides the finance firm Money Matters Financial Services, accused of acting as a “middleman” for the loan beneficiaries. Finance Minister Pranab Mukherjee has, however, asked investors not to panic over the case, arguing that it is a matter of individual wrongdoing and not a widespread scam affecting the banking sector.

Commonwealth Games. This sporting extravaganza in October, which cost up to US \$6 billion, is suspected of serious corruption in 16 projects, ranging from the purchase of equipment to the issuing of contracts. The allegations include manipulations of tenders in the building of stadia and other games infrastructure, and inflating bills for equipment such as treadmills and toilet paper rolls.

Suresh Kalmadi, Chairman of the Organising Committee, was dismissed by the ruling Congress Party as secretary of its parliamentary wing. Three of his close associates have been arrested.

Housing Scam. The 31-storey Adarsh Housing Society apartment block in the posh Colaba area in south Mumbai, meant for Kargil war heroes and war widows, was given to bureaucrats, relatives of politicians and former army and navy chiefs, among others. It was also built flouting environmental norms. On publication of the story, Ashok Chavan, under pressure, resigned as Chief Minister of Maharashtra.

The apartments with market value estimated at US \$1.8 million each were sold for as little as \$130,000. The Bombay Municipal Corporation was prompt to discontinue the supply of water and electricity. The scam is now under CBI investigation.

Just as the storm of criticism around the Congress Party’s record on governance was at its height news reports in two magazines shifted the spotlight away from the Telecom Minister and spectrum allocations to news reporters. The news reports carried transcripts of leaked phone taps of conversations between top reporters like NDTV’s Barkha Dutt, Hindustan Times columnist Vir Sanghvi, senior editors at various business dailies and corporate lobbyist Niira Radia, who represents the

Tata Group and Reliance Industries chair Mukesh Ambani. The conversations were tapped by the income tax department after a tip-off that Ms Radia might be a spy.

[Sources: *Factbox, Wall Street Journal, Thaindian*]

Pakistan

Lessons of Egypt for Pakistan

Taimur Rahman, General Secretary of the Communist Mazdoor Kisan Party in an interview by the Indian internet magazine *Daily News and Analysis* on 6th February explained why he doubted Pakistan's going the way of Egypt. (www.dnaindia.com/world/report_will-pakistan-go-the-egypt-way_1503757)

He denounced the Taliban in Pakistan as an extremely reactionary organisation opposed to land reform and development and not caring for the interests of the oppressed, and whose mass support is modest, and restricted to a few tribal areas. Decades of religious fundamentalism had created pockets that support this reactionary agenda; but the Taliban cannot win mass electoral support. He accepted the possibility of a liberation theology movement like the school of thought led by Javed Ahmad Ghamidi paying a progressive role, but when the progressive movement is strong, as happened in Latin America.

On the prospect of the uprising in Egypt being mirrored in Pakistan, he drew attention to serious differences like the far more unstable regime and diverse society in Pakistan than Egypt. The phenomenon of terrorism is a major factor. Also he expressed uncertainty about what shape this uprising will take.

Nepal: Struggle for Democracy

Maoists Consolidate Party Unity

The Nepali Maoists once again demonstrated their will to resolve political differences through democratic discussion. On 17th December, the UCPN (Maoist) Central Committee endorsed revised version of the political paper of party Chairman Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) that proposes to go for a revolt in the event of conspiracy against peace and the new constitution. The political paper recognised 'Indian expansionism and

intermingling of domestic reactionaries' as the principal enemy, and while proposing to put forward a slogan of struggle for peace and constitution, it also emphasised people's revolt.

Vice Chairman Baidya, who had major reservations about agreeing to the end of the People's War in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the dissolution of the People's Government, and held that the party-led government proved to be a failure, expressed satisfaction that the meeting had mandated the party to launch a 'people's revolt', and urged the party to fight for a people's federal republic and national independence.

Vice-chairman Bhattarai has expressed reservations that the proposed action plan will only help counter-revolution in the context of the national and international situation, but was agreeable with the immediate plan of action.

[Sources: southasiarev.wordpress.com/2010/12/22/prachanda-suggests-fresh-revolt-if-peace-process-is-threatened/;
southasiarev.wordpress.com/2010/12/18/nepal-baidhya-says-revolt-is-plenums-mandate/]

Subversion Thwarted

The UCPN (Maoist) enabled the election in February of a new Prime Minister by withdrawing from the contest and supporting Jhalanath Khanal, a more friendly leader from the CPN-UML, based on a 7-point agreement between leaders of both parties, concerning the issues of Maoist combatants, future leadership of the government, and constitution writing. As expected, on 8th February, the pro-Indian KP Sharma Oli of the CPN-UML, a party to the deal, joined the rank opportunist Madav Kumar Nepal to oppose the agreement as erroneous, and hence reject it. Sanity prevailed and the CPN-UML leaders consented to the agreement, subject to some amendments.

Following a subsequent meeting between the two parties, Khanal announced: "We want to make it clear we will go ahead as per the agreement". Dahal said there need be no confusion Khanal was elected prime minister based on that agreement and added that the Maoists would work in the spirit of the accord, and both leaders said they would resolve the matter of cabinet formation as soon as possible.

It is known that Indian expansionists wish political instability in Nepal as long as the Maoists have a say in the affairs of the state. The election of Khanal itself was not as they anticipated. The two leaders further disappointed the Indian establishment by jointly clarifying on 15th February that the agreement was signed to complete the historic

responsibility of writing the constitution and establishing lasting peace and urging other parties not to suspect the intentions behind the seven point pact and move ahead to protect the achievements of the People's Movement such as republic, federalism, democracy, secularism, proportional representation, inclusion and social justice.

Following the joint statement, Khanal and Dahal met on 16th morning to agree on a power-sharing pact, with the Maoists getting 11 ministries, including Home Affairs, Foreign Affairs, and Peace and Reconstruction. Bharat Mohan Adhikari of the CPN-UML leader has already sworn in as the Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister.

Dahal minced no words when he said, "The foreign country that has been virtually ruling Nepal and has been influencing all of our internal decisions is against the agreement but the government will take full shape by Thursday (17th February) and the same government will bring peace the process to its logical end and draft the constitution".

[Sources: southasiarev.wordpress.com/2011/02/09/nepal-maoist-offer-to-opposition-party-rejected/#more-10702; telegraphnepal.com/news_det.php?news_id=8853]

North Korea: Firm not Rigid

US imperialism and its reactionary client state in South Korea have worked hard to isolate North Korea (DPRK). South Korea (ROK) accused North Korea of sinking by torpedo a South Korean naval vessel in international waters in February 2010. The US and the 'International Community' accepted this version, ignoring DPRK protests and its offer of help to investigate the incident. Since then, the US and its client were busy provoking North Korea, which has stood firm amid provocation.

Attempts to drive a wedge between DPRK and China have failed. Following the announcement of joint military drills from 28th February to 10th March by the ROK and US, on 14th February, China and DPRK vowed to maintain close ties and enhance cooperation on regional security. The drill, to be held amid simmering tensions on the Korean Peninsula, involves 12,800 US and 200,000 ROK troops, as well as a US aircraft carrier. Liu Jiangyong, East Asia expert at the Tsinghua University said that the exercise is a continuation of the ROK's intensive drills in areas around the DPRK in 2010, aimed to exert military pressure on the DPRK, which apparently did not have a good outcome.

Fred Goldstein, a commentator for the International Action Center (see www.iacenter.org/korea/korea122310/) commended the DPRK for defusing tension by showing restraint amid provocative live-fire exercises

on 20th December 2010 from Yeonpyeong Island, 13 km from its mainland, and thereby showing that the US and ROK were military provocateurs willing to risk a major war. He also said that DPRK's strong stand had forced the imperialists to deal with the situation diplomatically at the UN Security Council and by sending an unofficial negotiator, Bill Richardson, to the North Korean capital, Pyongyang.

Escalation of tensions by the US in the Yellow Sea region has more to it than 'taming' the DPRK. It has much to do with the desire of US imperialism to restrict China's growth as a naval power in East Asia. It also concerns the encirclement of Russia.

Japan too jumped into the fray by carrying out massive joint military drills with the US in December, involving around 34 000 Japanese Self-Defence Force personnel, 40 warships and 250 aircraft alongside 10 000 US personnel, 20 warships and 150 aircraft, days after the US and South Korean show of force towards the end of November.

Following DPRK's retaliatory attack of 23rd November on Yeonpyeong island, which killed four people, China proposed that the six nations involved in long-stalled North Korean denuclearisation talks should hold an emergency meeting on the crisis. Instead, the US, Japan and South Korea held their own talks in Washington on 6th December in an apparent snub to China.

[Sources: english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_northkorea/454553.html;
www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=22215]

The Philippines: Opposing Plunder

The People's Democratic Government (PDG) in the Philippines controls the affairs of a significant part of the country, in defiance the authority of the reactionary Government of the Philippines (GoP). On 29th December, the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) reiterated the policy of the PDG banning all enterprises that engage in large-scale plunder of the natural resources, land grabbing and destruction of the environment and thereby violate the welfare and interests of the people and disregard the rules and regulations of the people's democratic government.

The reiteration by the CPP was in response to the GoP's claim that big, foreign mining companies are threatening to pull out their operations in protest over increases in "taxes" imposed by the revolutionary movement, and some officials in the negotiating team of the GoP declaring that they would take up the matter with the negotiators of the National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) in the upcoming talks in Oslo.

The CPP dismissed accusations by the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) that the NPA “collects taxes” from mining companies. The CPP drew attention to the devastation of the environment by large-scale foreign mining operations and to the super-profits made by the mining companies by plundering the natural resources, grabbing people’s land, especially ancestral lands of national minorities, exploiting the workers and colluding with corrupt top government officials. It also charged that the companies have hostile private armies as well as use the regular forces as well as the paramilitary units of the AFP to secure their enterprises and suppress the mass resistance against their operations.

The statement pointed out that, the PDG has directed the NPA to carry out punitive actions against these mining companies to put a stop to their operations, and that in certain circumstances, fines have been levied on these companies and turned over to the people as a form of reparation for the destruction caused by the companies and as a deterrent.

The CPP added that if the GRP negotiating panel raises the issue of the alleged “revolutionary taxation” on big mining operations in the upcoming talks, that would make necessary a thoroughgoing accounting of the massive destruction of the environment, the land grabbed and the super-profits earned by these companies *vis-a-vis* the benefits claimed by the Philippine government.

[Source: www.philippinerevolution.net]

LATIN AMERICA & THE CARIBBEAN

Ecuador: Awaiting Changes

Ecuador will vote for the first time on 7th May in a referendum to be formally announced on 8th March. The referendum proposed by the government led by President Rafael Correa is on ten subjects of which five concern constitutional amendments. The referendum is an important democratic exercise in the wake of the failed coup attempt of late 2010.

The questions on constitutional amendments include expiry of preventive arrest; precautionary measures to replace preventive arrest; ownership of financial institutions and the mass media, and the creation of a Judiciary Council. The other five concern the criminalisation of non-

justified private enrichment and non-affiliation with social security; a ban on gambling and public shows where animals are killed; regulation of harmful content in the media, and establishment of liability.

[Source: www.plenglish.com]

Bolivia: Bowing to Popular Protest

Bolivia's popular President Evo Morales, following talks with trades unions and groups representing indigenous peoples, on 31st December rescinded a decree announced on 26th December, which raised fuel prices by more than 70% and sparked mass protests and a transport strike. The protests appeared to be turning into a major political test that Morales has had to face since he became Bolivia's first indigenous president in 2005; and by a timely retreat in the face of mass protests, Morales averted a serious political crisis, but at some cost to his credibility.

[Source: www.france24.com]

Haiti: Testing Democracy

The bid by incumbent President René Préal to make presidential candidate Jude Célestin his successor was thwarted by popular protest which led to an investigation of irregularities by a team of the Organisation of American States. Official results of the disputed presidential election of November 2010 showed that Mirlande Manigat (Rally of Progressive National Democrats) secured 31.37% of the votes; Jude Célestin (INITE) 22.48%; and Michel Martelly (Repons Peyizan) 21.84%. Célestin was manoeuvred into second place by irregular practices so that he could contest the runoff which was scheduled for 16th January.

Following inquiries by the OAS, former senator Ms Mirlande Manigat and singer Michel Martelly were named as candidates for the runoff election. Campaigning started on 17th February for voting on 20th March. It should be noted that the party of the former president Aristade, ousted twice by the US and forced to live in exile in South Africa, was not allowed to contest the election. Also, on 7th February, President Préal, rather ominously, declared that he would stay in office for three more months, extending his term beyond the runoff.

On 19th January, former dictator of Haiti, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier was charged with corruption, theft, misappropriation of funds and other crimes committed during his period in power, after he was produced before a judge in the earthquake devastated capital Port-au-Prince, two days after his return from a self-imposed 25 year exile in France where he has squandered his stolen wealth. The charges remain to be investigated by the judge to decide on a criminal case against him.

The reason for his return and its possible impact on a country with a leadership vacuum following the year-long post-quake crisis aggravated by virtual military control by the US remain unknown.

[Sources: www.guardian.co.uk, www.nytimes.com]

EUROPE:

Aftershocks of North Africa

In the last week of February, following the soaring of oil prices in the wake of Libya's violent uprising, European stocks suffered the biggest weekly retreat since July 2010, led by declines in the airlines and automobile industries. The benchmark Stoxx Europe 600 Index slumped by 2.4%. National benchmark indices fell in all of Europe's eighteen markets, except Norway and Denmark. France's CAC-40 Index slid 2.1%. UK's FTSE-100 retreated by 1.3% and Germany's DAX by 3.3%.

[Source: www.bloomberg.com]

Greece: Protesting Burdens

Recession of the Greek economy is deepening: unemployment surged to 13.9%, while the economy shrank by 4.5% in 2010. The country's retailers association, ESEE, forecast the bankruptcy of about 120 000 small and medium-size businesses by the end of 2011, depriving the state of up to \$10 billion in tax revenue.

In early February, international debt monitors demanded a "significant acceleration" of long-term reforms in Greece to avoid missing its economic targets. They also urged the "Socialist" government to embark on a 50 billion Euro (\$68 billion) privatisation program to pay

for some of its mounting national debt, set to exceed 150% of the GDP this year.

Protests rocked Athens once again on 23rd February. Police said that around 33 000 attended the Athens rally, while the organisers claimed around 100 000. Elsewhere, about 15,000 people rallied and around 60 demonstrations were held in cities and towns across Greece. Minor scuffles broke out in Greece's second largest city, Thessaloniki.

The strike on 23rd February shut down schools, hospitals and all government offices. Stathis Anestis, deputy leader of the GSEE, the largest trade union of Greece, said that the union was in talks with European labour unions to coordinate future strikes with other EU countries. Anestis said that workers should not be asked to make more sacrifices during a third straight year of recession and job losses.

[Sources: www.npr.org; www.latimes.com]

Germany: Growing Disaffection

In the first of seven state elections scheduled for 2011 that will test the resilience of the ruling coalition of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) led by Chancellor Angela Merkel with the Free Democratic Party (FDP), the citizens of Hamburg, a port city with the status of a state, inflicted a humiliating defeat on the CDU on February 20th. Its share of the vote fell by nearly half, to 22%. The Social Democratic Party (SPD) won nearly half the votes and won a majority in the city's legislature.

While the result is a verdict on the state government and not the federal government, it reflects the unpopularity of the neo-liberal policies of the Federal Government, which in 2010 lost its majority in the upper house of parliament. After Hamburg, Merkel's power will wane further. An immediate result of the defeat was that the government yielded to the opposition parties on social welfare, allowing higher social benefits and a minimum wage for several types of worker.

[Source: www.economist.com]

Who is the Terrorist?

N Pradeepan

**I was arrested in a peaceful early morning
He who arrested me said in a harsh tone:
“You are a terrorist.
That is why we have arrested you”.**

**Far too many ‘terrorists’
have been put in prison
by him and his mates.
I was added to that category.**

**Among those in prison were
a terrorist father of three;
a terrorist seeking employment in the garbage capital
owing to growing poverty in the plantations.**

**Not just them.
Haulers of goods, fishmongers,
persons without police registration,
the homeless sleeping by the roadside—
all were locked up in prison as terrorists.**

**Pity, that the one who is arresting
is roaming with manacles in hand
unable to seek out the real terrorists.**

**Those who you arrested are innocent—
the real terrorists are
seated securely in Parliament
in comfort
afforded by tax gathered from you and us.**

**As long as terrorists rule the world
many innocent people could be arrested.
I pity you and your mates.
Your plight may be one
where you may have to arrest
your own brother.**

**Then
you and your mates will understand
who are innocent and
who are sinful terrorists.**

15-04-2009

***(Comrade N Pradeepan was arrested in early 2009, detained
for two years without charges and released recently)***

Companions in Imprisonment

T Jeyaseelan

*There is no one nearby for them to talk to!
They talk to the walls and
at times to the wind, at times to the sky
at times to nameless orphaned birds
wandering like themselves,
to the barbed wire fence
debarring them from roaming about.
They calm themselves,
blame their helplessness,
kneel,
and, seated on the ground,
talk to the soil!*

*There is no one nearby for them to talk to!
Their kin may have scattered
to be in another 'zone'
or in the heavens.*

*Those who thrived as live branches
are here today
alone with their shadows,
passing time
in conversation with
the tarpoline sheet, plastic mat,
water pot, bucket,
a variety of identity cards,
and the family card
issued to them.*

Why?

Sri Prakash

Which gun, and where will it speak?
Which body, and where will it fall?
Movements asking themselves
seeking moments not penetrated by bullets
to pass moments not penetrated by bullets

Because the other day I smiled at him?
Because I gave water to my little sister?
Because I thanked my little brother and moved away?
Because yesterday I threw a glance for a meal?— No,
because I did none of these.

The paper will say a nineteen year old was shot dead
Tomorrow it will say a seventy year old was shot dead
That has become visible reality—
there is none to sorrow over the shooting
for visible reality has conditioned us

You say that it was an offence to give water
What do you say of bumping one off?
I gave life to a wounded deer that came running
You say that it was an offence to give life

Let wounds touch my body
after you say why
because
those who died yesterday
did not know why they lost their life,
those who died today
do not understand it either
Let those who die tomorrow at least
die knowing why

Sultan

Nizar Qabbani

If I were promised safety,
if I could meet the Sultan
I would say to him: O my lord the Sultan!
my cloak has been torn by your ravenous dogs,
your spies are following me all the time.
Their eyes
their noses
their feet are chasing me
like destiny, like fate
They interrogate my wife
and write down all the names of my friends.
O Sultan!
Because I dare to approach your deaf walls,
because I tried to reveal my sadness and tribulation,
I was beaten with my shoes.
O my lord the Sultan!
you have lost the war twice
because half our people
have no tongue.

The Will of life

Abu al-Qasim al-Shabi

**If the people will to live
Providence is destined to
favourably respond
And night is destined to fold
And the chains are certain to be broken**

**And he who has not
embraced the love of life
Will evaporate in its atmosphere
and disappear**

Translated by As'ad Abu Khalil.

This poem by the Tunisian poet al-Shabi, who died young, was first used in the uprising against French colonial rule. Now, 80 years later, the words inspire revolutionaries in Tunisia and Egypt.

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