

Acc. No. 2 DEC 1979

NARC

140051

18

Singapore Government Press Release

# PRESS RELEASE

Information Division, Ministry of Culture, City Hall, Singapore 0617, tel. 328191 ext. 352, 353, 354 / 362207 / 362271.

MC/NOV/49/79 (Foreign Affairs)

79-14-14

SPEECH BY MR S RAJARATNAM, MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS,  
AT A TALK TO THE UNIVERSITY OF SINGAPORE STUDENTS'  
POLITICAL ASSOCIATION AT THE BUKIT TIMAI CAMPUS (NLT1)  
ON FRIDAY, 23 NOVEMBER 1979

The Asian correspondent of the Financial Times, in an article published in yesterday's Straits Times commenting on Asean's recent diplomatic success in the United Nations observed as follows:

"Since Vietnam's attack on Kampuchea last December the five (Asean countries) have successfully co-ordinated a diplomatic campaign against Vietnam and marshalled international opinion in support of it. Their cohesion and determination has impressed their friends in the West."

I am afraid, however, that in the process the Asean countries have also disconcerted that section of Western opinion which believes that it is the repository of progressive liberal wisdom: they stand pat on the side of all peace-loving and down trodden masses. For nearly 30 years Vietnam was their folk hero, an object of adulation, emulation and contemplation. It was the occasion for ritualistic stand-ins, stand-ups and when conditions were ripe for riotous blow-ups as well. A victorious Vietnam, they averred, would bring to the rest of South-East Asia the message of peace, security and brotherhood of man. South-East Asia freed of the predations of Western imperialism and indigenous tyrannies would become a region filled with the pealing laughter of well-fed children while the toiling masses toiled away beating the swords the Americans had left behind into gleaming ploughshares.

This vision may not have been painted the graphic way I have but I think it brings out the essential message.

By contrast the Western progressive attitude towards Asean was one of patronising contempt. We were the unsavory creatures of American imperialism and Western monopoly capitalism. We were a military bloc plotting to hold back the forward march of progressive forces in the region. The only friends we had so it was claimed were the Western imperialists who fed and clothed us and that our prestige and influence in the world were nowhere near that enjoyed by the heroic leaders of Vietnam. Moreover we were a fragile organisation of decadent reactionaries doomed to be swept away by the tide of liberating revolution.

These two myths were rudely shattered this year when put to the test. On four occasions in the United Nations and also at the Havana Non-aligned conference Asean successfully mobilised world opinion against Vietnam over the question of Kampuchea. The Asean inspired resolutions submitted twice to the United Nations Security Council were made inoperative only by the veto of its two Communist members. However the Asean initiated resolutions on the continued seating of Democratic Kampuchea and on the withdrawal of Vietnamese forces from Kampuchea were approved by overwhelming majorities by the General Assembly. In the case of the resolution calling for the withdrawal of Vietnamese troops from Kampuchea the Vietnamese and their friends could only mobilise 21 as against Asean's 91.

Even at Havana even though the Asean members had to play with dice loaded in favour of the Vietnamese, 25 members spoke in favour of seating Democratic Kampuchea as against 21 who opposed. This did not inhibit the Cuban chairman from claiming that the 21 represented consensus. This fortunately turned out to be a temporary victory. When the non-aligned foreign ministers reassembled in the freer atmosphere of New York to approve a report on the Havana meeting to the U.N. the foreign ministers threw out reference to the so-called consensus on Kampuchea.

So today Western progressives are somewhat dismayed and bewildered as to how an allegedly crummy reactionary outfit like Asean could so decisively command the respect of the world as against the combined effort of Vietnam and their even more powerful friends. To protect ourselves against possible charges that we were acting as

cat's-paw for great powers we requested countries like the United States, China and Britain to leave the initiative in respect of these resolutions to the Asean countries. We wanted it to be an Asean effort and a test of Asean political strength.

Of course, coming down to brass tacks, Asean political strength as defined in political text books may not be all that considerable. We have neither the economic or military clout to reinforce our political strength. The two factors responsible for Asean's diplomatic success were (a) the weakness of Vietnam's case and the arrogance and recklessness with which they presented it and (b) Asean's uninhibited espousal of basic principles of international law and decency which even the hard-faced U.N. delegates held in respect and even awe - , opposition to foreign intervention, particularly armed intervention, in the internal affairs of another country on the grounds that the incumbent government is barbarous. This principle is highly cherished in the U.N. because to repudiate it would have made many members vulnerable. Yet the Vietnamese, who have a reputation for being skilful propagandists, kept plugging away at two arguments - de-recognise Pol Pot because the Vietnamese army, at Heng Samrin's request, is in absolute control of the country and the second endorse Vietnamese occupation because they had got rid of a bad government. The more the Vietnamese and their friends kept repeating these two arguments, the more I was convinced they were winning votes for Asean. A great many Third World countries even as they listened to the Vietnamese thesis were, I am sure, working out the implications its endorsement would have for them. Put very bluntly what the Vietnamese were proposing was that if an aggressor could prove that his aggression has been successful then the U.N. should legalise a breach of U.N. principles. I did not think that such a daring proposition would go down well with many countries nursing grave apprehensions about their near and distant neighbours.

These then are some of the reasons why Asean was able to mobilise massive votes against Vietnam on the question of Kampuchea.

The diplomatic set-back for Vietnam would, one would have thought, caused Western progressives to take a second look at some of the myths they had cultivated about Vietnam. Instead their response

has been to launch a second Save-Vietnam campaign. The first shots of this campaign have already been discharged to judge by reports in the British mass media. Since the Vietnamese have clearly failed to mobilise world opinion for their unworthy cause in Kampuchea some Western progressives have now taken up cudgels on their behalf. As far as they are concerned Vietnam can do no wrong and if world opinion thinks otherwise to hell with it.

So in the coming months ASEAN's more troublesome adversaries on the issue of Kampuchea are more likely to be Western liberals. They will conduct the political battle thus enabling the Vietnamese to concentrate on the noble task of pounding the resisting Kampucheanas as may survive into submission. Down with imperialism and up with people's progressive imperialism.

So I hope you will bear with me if I spend some time on those non-Communist Western progressives with whom sooner or later we may have to cross swords. At the moment their target is not world opinion or even ASEAN but selected democratic governments, particularly in the Western world. Their immediate objectives are two-fold. First to persuade Western opinion that responsibility for the horrors now going on in Kampuchea does not lie with the Vietnamese but with others and second that Democratic Kampuchea should be punished by de-recognition for resisting the Vietnamese. These were the two objectives the Vietnamese tried to achieve in the U.N. and failed. But if a number of Western democratic countries could be pressurised into reversing their voting position in the U.N. then a stampede could be started in favour of the puppet Heng Samrin regime and the right of Vietnam to liberate countries whose governments outrage their sense of decency.

At the moment the British, Indian and Australian governments are already under strong pressure to de-recognise Democratic Kampuchea. It is possible that with elections pending next month the Indian Government, despite their earlier assurances to the contrary might be forced to go to the extreme of recognising the Heng Samrin regime.

The Indian government has already de-recognised Democratic Kampuchea. Since even in politics there is abhorrence for vacuums, recognition of Heng Samrin must be the next step. Though some 30 Communist and pro-Communist countries have recognised the Heng Samrin regime, it has not been able after a year to get endorsement from a major non-Communist country. Without such endorsement the digestion of Kampuchea will be more difficult than it now is. Hence the focus on first bringing about the de-recognition of Democratic Kampuchea.

According to a report from Canberra last Monday the Australian Government is under strong pressure from the Labour opposition to reverse its U.N. decision in respect of Democratic Kampuchea. Providentially added impetus to this demand has been given by a well-timed report that two Australian yachtsmen had "probably" been murdered in a Kampuchean concentration camp. Apparently this "probable" murder had gone unnoticed for nearly a year. It happened in November last year which is rather fortunate for the case for de-recognition because by December the Vietnamese had overrun the place. It would have been rather awkward for those concerned had the date not been November. The fact that it was the Australian Labour Party which accorded recognition to the Pol Pot regime in March 1975 has not inhibited it from manifesting a delayed sense of outrage. It is said that power corrupts but more totally sometimes those out of power.

I understand that some elements in the Labour Party of Britain are also pressing hard for the de-recognition of Democratic Kampuchea. Hence the increasing prominence given in the British news media to what the American Tom Wolff termed the Radical Chics of the Western world who go Mau-Mauing. They hope to set up a chain reaction. As you know, all you need is to set one locust to jumping to get the whole swarm moving.

However there is one very serious impediment in the way of persuading Western public opinion to acquiesce in the Vietnamese occupation of Kampuchea - the ongoing horrors in Kampuchea. Certain rather inconvenient facts have to be explained away first. The Western public, thanks to extensive press and T.V. coverage, have been horrified by the sight of hundreds of thousands of Kampucheans fleeing for their lives into Thailand from a liberation army. Hundreds of thousands have died of disease and starvation and if the war goes on we can count the victims in millions. We also know that the initial liberation force from Vietnam has, in the course of a year swelled, to an estimated 200,000. We know too that a large scale war, backed by generous aid from outside, is going on in Kampuchea despite the claim that Heng Samrin is in total control of the country. We also know that never even under Pol Pot has there been a flow of refugees on the scale we are now witnessing nor reports of wholesale starvation as we are now receiving. And so understandably the first question the world asked was: "Who is responsible?" In the U.N. and elsewhere the finger pointed unwaveringly at Vietnam. As long as this belief persists the Save Vietnam campaign runs into a quagmire of awkward facts. So why not get the finger pointing some other way -- anywhere except the Vietnamese,

So some Western liberals have come up with a remarkable theory which deserves a chapter in Thoules famous book on "Straight and Crooked Thinking." I shall term it "The theory of responsibility through antecedent causes."

According to this new theory the men really behind it all are Mr Richard Nixon, Dr Henry Kissinger and Mr Pol Pot - the new Gang of Three. For example the current issue of the London Observer carries a headline that aptly describes the New Enlightenment. It reads: "Deaths that haunt Dr Kissinger." So you see Dr Kissinger is having nightmares over what is now going on in Kampuchea and so he must be the culprit. The Vietnamese leaders on the other hand have no ghosts haunting them and it should therefore be clear to any "straight-thinker" that the Vietnamese cannot be held responsible.

Now one could hold Nixon and Kissinger responsible for what they did in Kampuchea when they were in office. But I cannot for the life of me see how these two gentlemen who have been out of

office for years and who have not been anywhere near the scene of the crime and who have been spending the last few years writing memoirs whose financial rewards quite properly excite the envy of the lesser scribes who proclaim the new theory - I cannot see how Nixon and Kissinger can be said to be overseeing the horrors now going on in Kampuchea. This is where the new theory of responsibility through antecedent causes comes in. It goes something like this. Dr Kissinger ordered the bombing of, as the article says, "a fat, peaceful little Kampuchea, full of rice, water buffaloes and lively children". By doing so he destroyed the neutrality of Kampuchea. This logically led to the emergence of the Khmer Rouge as a major force, thus compelling the Vietnamese in turn to support the Khmer Rouge. Then the Khmer Rouge turned nasty on the Vietnamese. This compelled the Vietnamese to march into Kampuchea and in the process bringing starvation and death. So Dr Kissinger is responsible. Q.E.D.

This new theory of responsibility by tracing antecedent causes offers mind boggling possibilities. As Marx would say you can also stand it on its feet. If I were Dr Kissinger he could argue thus: the Western liberals helped to bring about the defeat of America. This resulted in the emergence of victorious Communist Vietnam and a victorious Khmer Rouge nurtured by the Vietnamese. This intensified friction between Vietnam, China, the Soviet Union and Kampuchea. This led to the Vietnamese invasion of Kampuchea and the punishment by China. And so finally to the present horrors.

I suspect that the Western radical Chics have been for some time living in dread that sooner or later someone would stumble on to this new theory and pin responsibility for Kampuchea on them. If Dr Kissinger is haunted by aging ghosts the Radical Chics have some fresh ghosts lining up. So better fix the responsibility on Dr Kissinger first.

In fact it occurs to me if you press this theory of antecedent causes far back enough you could pin responsibility for the whole sorry business on the Creator himself. Given the premise that he created the world it is a shut and close case.

Now what about the theory that Pol Pot is responsible for it all? He should of course be held responsible for all that happened when he was in charge, that is, up till Christmas Day last year.

Now up to December 1978 Pol Pot's record was by any standard, sordid and gruesome. But the horrors now going on in Kampuchea, at least from the viewpoint of the Kampuchean people, far exceed any that Pol Pot managed to contrive.

As evidence let me bring to your attention a little event which Western Liberals and the Vietnamese are loath to talk about today. In November last year a month before the invasion of Kampuchea the British Tory government laid a complaint before the U.N. Human Rights Commission charging the Pol Pot regime with grave transgressions of human rights. As far as I know no Western progressive highlighted this courageous move by a Tory Government or lent it their support. Even if they wanted to they would have been inhibited from doing so. This is because the Communist members of the U.N. chose to denounce the British move as an imperialist slanderous attack on what was categorised as a progressive regime. As far as I am aware authenticated reports of murders and brutalities by the Pol Pot regime were received by progressives with stony silence. Up to December 25 last year there was no demand from any quarter for de-recognition of the Pol Pot regime.

This upsurge of revulsion against Pol Pot can be dated precisely. It surfaced after December 25 last year - the day the Vietnamese invaded Kampuchea and announced to the world that they were embarked on a mission to rid the world of, and I quote, "the monstrous, genocidal Pol Pot regime." After that the locusts were jumping to the get-rid-of-Pol Pot tune.

Only after the Communists had developed a stomachache over Pol Pot did Western Liberals complain that he was giving them ulcers.

Now whatever the crimes committed by Pol Pot, it is a fact that there was no massive outflow of refugees out of that country. In fact just before the invasion of Kampuchea world aid organisations were called upon to deal with refugees from Vietnam rather than from Kampuchea. There were no reports before December 1978 of mass starvation in Kampuchea. In fact in that year it had even started exporting a little grain. Further the Swedish Ambassador in Thailand and Elizabeth Becker of the Washington Post both of whom were among the first foreigners to visit that country published

their impressions. They were not particularly enthusiastic about what they saw but certainly from their reports things were nowhere near as bad as they are now. It is always invidious having to choose between evils but today hundreds of thousands of Kampuchean are making this choice with their feet and with guns. Consider this fact. The Vietnamese claim that they have one of the most powerful military machines in the world. It certainly crippled first that of the French and then that of the Americans. And yet one year after the invasion Pol Pot's crummy military machine has Vietnam's mighty military machine bogged down. I think the reason is that however much the Kampuchean may hate Pol Pot they hate the invaders even more. That is why the Vietnamese won against desperate odds, as did many other nations. That is why today the Pol Pot forces are not the only resistance groups.

So in view of the case I have presented the non-Communist progressives of the Western world should, for a change, pluck up enough courage to think independently about the tragedy of Kampuchea. It should not be made a pretext for working out personal fantasies about Nixon and Kissinger or to serve as catharsis for troubled consciences. Perhaps they should put aside the patronising intellectual arrogance they have in the past shown towards non-Communist states of the Third World. May be we do not kick their countries in the teeth as often enough as their Communist friends do and who consequently appear to elicit their grateful and servile respect. There is a moral somewhere in this but I am loath to search for it now.

Perhaps they should ask themselves why five non-Communist Asean states were able to elicit the support and understanding of two-thirds of the members of the U.N. for continued representation of Democratic Kampuchea and for the withdrawal of Vietnam from that country. Surely two-thirds of the world's nations cannot all be made up of morons? Is it not also possible that the majority of nations in supporting the Asean sponsored resolutions saw in them a possible way of averting the decimation of people.

For what it is worth I should like to end by explaining the rationale behind Asean's two resolutions - at least to that section of Western progressives who really want to end the Kampuchean tragedy. We better than Western progressives are aware of the significance of what is going on in Kampuchea. We live close to

it and do not wish similar horrors to visit us. We do not want to become fresh sources for good newspaper copy or for stomach churning T.V. newsreels and documentaries in other people's drawing rooms.

We in ASEAN are not revolutionaries out to subdue and convert Communist Indo-China to our way of life. Our temperaments as well as our political systems are not geared for any such colourful enterprise.

The initial declaration of the Vietnamese soon after their victory was that their next task was to work for genuine independence and freedom in the rest of South-East Asia. They unsuccessfully tried to introduce a resolution to this effect at the non-aligned conference at Colombo in 1976.

The initial response of the ASEAN countries on the other hand was to offer friendship and co-operation with the new Vietnam. Admittedly Singapore was the most cautious of the five but even we had already made arrangements for exchange of diplomatic missions with Vietnam. There were genuine hopes on the part of ASEAN countries that co-operation between them and the Indo-Chinese states could free South-East Asia from the grip of great power politics and convert it into a region of peace and prosperity and even of some consequence in world affairs.

This dream was rudely shattered by one single act - the invasion of Kampuchea. That action overnight converted the region from an area of promise into an arena for great power politics. The Vietnamese claim that their action was to keep Chinese influence out of the region. I think they have now made this more probable. That action has forced the Vietnamese to enter into a military alliance with the Soviet Union and become more dependent on one great power for their survival. They have shattered their credibility about non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. Their three-year preoccupation with the economic reconstruction of their country has given way to a war economy. Three years after the end of a long and terrible war Vietnamese guns are once again booming and their soldiers are again on the march. And overnight the great esteem in which a heroic people were held has, as the voting in the U.N. showed, vanished into thin air.

All these and much more flows from the inexplicable decision of Vietnam's leaders to reverse their policy of accommodation and co-operation with neighbours in favour of aggression against one of them - and that a former ally and a Communist country. And the longer Vietnam persists with its war in Kampuchea the more likely they are to produce consequences just the opposite of what they say they want. A policy which can in one short year bring about so many adversities must clearly be unsound.

That is why if we are to revive the happier and more hopeful promise of the three years preceding the invasion of Kampuchea, Vietnamese withdrawal from that country is logical and necessary. In mobilising world opinion towards this end, there was no desire on the part of Asean countries to confront or defeat Vietnam. Why should we? A strong, prosperous and independent Vietnam would be a source of strength to Asean as well as to South-East Asia. This then is the rationale behind Asean's U.N. resolutions. This is why so many of the world's nations voted for them.

So Western progressives by helping relieve this pressure on the Vietnamese and encouraging them to believe that their Kampuchean policy is correct are manifesting an irresponsibility beside which that of Pol Pot pales into insignificance. The ghosts that will haunt them will be far more real and more numerous than those which allegedly co-habit with Dr Kissinger. This is the real Kampuchean sideshow awaiting the facile pen of a struggling author out to produce a bestseller in the eighties.

-o--o--o--o--o--o-