

Bandung spirit and the new Indian regime

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Opini3n

That India's Prime Minister Mr Narendra Modi decided not to attend the Sixtieth Anniversary celebration of the Bandung Conference of Asian and African countries on 21-24 April and instead sent Ms Sushama Swaraj, Minister for External Affairs, is indicative of the evolving approach of the new regime in India that came to power a year ago in May 2014. Questions are being raised in India today if the Modi government has opted for a foreign policy line that distances itself from the anti-imperialist, anti-racist campaigns in the post World War II period which built solidarity among newly liberated countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America and initiated processes which aimed at democratizing the world political economy. Building closer relations with US and its allies and focusing on inviting foreign capital for India's economic growth seem to dominate the thinking of the new regime.

Indian government's new posture

The apparent indifference to the Bandung legacy comes in the wake of a number of other instances where the Modi government has shown a distinct attitude. When the Sixtieth Anniversary of *Panchasheel* (Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence) was celebrated in Beijing in June 2014, the new government of India sent Vice President Hamid Ansari, whereas the other cofounder of the doctrine, Myanmar, was represented by its President. The Five Principles (Respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference, non-aggression, equality and mutual benefit and peaceful coexistence) first contained in the India-China Agreement on Tibet in 1954 and adopted by Myanmar, were the basis for the ten principles that the 29 heads of states and governments devised at Bandung in 1955, famously known as the Bandung Principles. They became the cornerstone of an alternative model of international affairs during the Cold War and core of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Thus the Five Principles gave rise to the Bandung Spirit as the perspective to end colonialism and neo-colonialism, refrain from military blocks, consolidate independence and work towards creating a new, equitable international political and economic order.

When the National Democratic Government (NDA, which brought the present government to power) had been in power in India the first time (1998-2004), under the leadership of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, there was no such break with the Panchasheel and Bandung legacy. No doubt a strategic shift to forge closer relations with US had begun at that time and that process continued under the United Progressive Government (UPA) when it was in power (2004-2014). Vajpayee's landmark visit to China in June 2003, which started a new momentum in India-China relations, used the Panchasheel framework and expanded upon it. Under the UPA regime India was represented at the Golden Jubilee celebrations of the Bandung Conference by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and was chosen to speak for Asia. In fact on the two sides of the host, the then Indonesian President Yudhoyono, Singh and Chinese President Hu Jintao led the procession of the leaders of the Conference.

Homage to Bandung's Founders

Foreign Minister Sushama Swaraj and her colleague Minister of State V K Singh avoided any reference to Nehru in their speeches at the sixtieth anniversary meeting except for a general reference to the 'visionary leaders of Asia and Africa who...'. This was noticed by everyone, marking the new Indian government's determined bid to break with the Nehru legacy. The delegates found it rather odd because Nehru was one of the main organizers of the 1955 conference and India was one of the five sponsors, the others being Myanmar, Indonesia, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. It is well-known that Nehru had taken the initiative to introduce Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai to the Afro-Asian leaders persuading them to accept China not as a member of the Soviet Block but a newly liberated Asian country.

In contrast to the Indian delegates' presentations, Chinese President Xi Jinping who was a star attraction of the sixtieth anniversary conference – the main star was the Indonesian President Joko Widodo who has taken a number of steps to institutionalize the Bandung Spirit- recalled Premier Zhou Enlai's contribution to the Bandung Conference and how China continued to abide by the Bandung Spirit.

The joint declaration adopted by 108 delegates, 29 observers and 25 international organizations, called the Bandung Message 2015, had a whole paragraph recognizing the contribution of the original founders of the Bandung Conference. Indian Ministers used the Bandung Platform to popularize Prime Minister Modi's 'Make in India' and 'Digital India' plans while generally supporting the main agenda of the conference on "Strengthening South-South Cooperation, to Promote World Peace and Prosperity".

Global Restructuring vs Rebalancing

There are two competing processes going on in the world today and the Bandung Spirit represents one of them. One is the process of global rebalancing and another is the process of global restructuring, the latter symbolized by Bandung. When economies such as those of China, India and Brazil picked up momentum with high rates of economic growth while the western economies entered into one phase of crisis after another, the global agencies dominated by the World Bank talked of the need to rebalance the global economy and politics. It meant incorporating the fast developing countries into the existing international economic and political order. This process started with the industrialized countries G-7, for a time G-8, inviting a set of big economies from Asia, Africa and Latin America to an extended meeting whenever they met. In the wake of the 2008 sub-prime crisis in US and then globally, this took a new conceptual form with the coming of G-20. This meeting of the twenty largest economies of the world has since then met every year to address issues of international finance, trade and other global issues. The question is whether the G-20 is taking the world in the direction of the goals set by G-77 – the Group of more than a hundred developing countries which have been trying to change the character of the existing world political economy- or following the agenda set by the G-7.

The Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung in 1955 spelt out a comprehensive vision to transform the world political, economic and cultural order. This was reiterated on the occasion of its Golden Jubilee in 2005 when NAAS (New Asian African Partnership) was adopted. That vision aims at restructuring the world political economy and having a participatory, decentralized, self-governing, equitable world order take shape. The goal is to replace the Bretton Woods financial system and the 'Cold War' military blocks and alliance politics and the West-dominated cultural and educational order. The perspective of global restructuring aims at democratizing power relations at every level, grassroots level, national and global

levels to promote conditions of equality, dignity and fulfillment of material, cultural and political aspirations of all people and all regions. On the other hand, the perspective of 'global rebalancing' maintains the existing pattern of power relations having some more big powers on the high table of global decision-making or some new powers taking the seats of the old.

The paradox is that under the on-going process of 'globalization' both processes are active. Dominant elites in India, China and most emerging countries share the 'rebalancing perspective' whereas people's movements within countries as well as world people's movements in the global NGO summits and some sections of the World Social Forum demand 'restructuring'. The Bandung Spirit undoubtedly promotes the historical trend of 'global restructuring' that responds to the rising aspirations of people all over the world to realize self-determination. That links the anti-colonial legacies with the civilizational heritage of all countries of all regions of the world with a future that was perceived by the United Nations Charter in 1945 but is yet to be realized.

Future struggles

The Sixtieth Anniversary celebration at Bandung has rekindled hopes of the possibility of regaining the momentum of democratic transformation of the global order. As Indonesia's President Joko Widodo said, "this revival of Afro-Asian Voice cannot be replaced by anyone". Extending the Bandung framework to South America and thus making it a movement of the South or ASAFSA (Asia, Africa and South America) assuming the role of the driving force for global future is a major development in the contemporary time. The Bandung Message 2015 adopted at the Conference gave a comprehensive perspective on global transformation by putting climate change, energy security, human rights, women's empowerment, food security, poverty eradication and disaster management as the core of the development program. Focusing on civilizational dialogue involving all cultures and regions of the world in a framework of peace-building, mutual respect was a timely response to the alienating consequences of the current wave of globalization and power politics by forces of hegemony.

Setting up a Bandung Centre as a permanent secretariat and coordination of these programs, putting in place mechanisms of coordination with various multilateral organizations, building an Afro-Asian University Network and above all declaring April 24 as the Bandung Day to be celebrated every year in all the Afro-Asian countries are bound to have long-term significance. The fact that the Bandung Conference had a special program to protect the interest of the small island countries of Pacific and other regions sent out a distinct message.

In 1955 many politicians from the US and other western countries shared this perspective and took part in Bandung even though US Secretary of State John Foster Dulles introduced the antagonistic frame, setting the terms of the Cold War^[1]. Today many in the US wish to support the Bandung perspective that can help the US to reorient its hegemonic perspective and be a partner in a global democratization process while its dominant elites still affirm its dominant leadership role in the world. That produces similar hegemonic policies in all regions to balance each other. Against this international politics based on neo-realist theory, Bandung represents the global politics of creative theory that locates itself in the dynamics of democratic transformation promoting the fulfillment of creative potential of all individuals, groups and regions in a framework of mutuality and interdependence.

Even though the new Indian regime took the decision to underplay the significance of Bandung, all other political parties, civil society groups, even many in the ruling party, BJP, itself share the values and aspirations for global transformation embodied in the Bandung Spirit.

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Article published in ALAI's Spanish language magazine: *América Latina en Movimiento*, No 504 (May 2015), titled: "60 años después: Vigencia del espíritu de Bandung".
<http://www.alainet.org/es/revistas/169851>

[1] Editor's note: The US was invited to send an unofficial observer to the meeting, but declined the invitation, mainly due to pressure from Dulles—one of the main mentors of the Cold War—who totally rejected any possibility of a neutral position towards communism.

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