

# Japan takes lead to heal Cambodia

by Linda de Hoyos

Japanese Prime Minister Toshiki Kaifu took the occasion of his visit to Thailand May 2 to declare that Japan will be acting to bring about a solution to the 11-year Cambodia conflict. "Japan is in a favorable position to help carry the ball," explained Japanese ambassador to Thailand Hisahiko Okazaki to the press. "Unlike other major powers, such as the Soviet Union, China, or the United States, Japan is not inhibited by any political factors in talking to all the four warring Cambodian factions," the *Bangkok Nation* reported Okazaki as saying.

The new Thai government of Prime Minister Anand Panyarachun offered its endorsement of Japan's role, during Kaifu's stay in Bangkok, thereby continuing the partnership with Tokyo that had begun with former Prime Minister Chatichai Choonhavan. Choonhavan, ousted in February, had shifted Thai policy from serving only as a conduit for Chinese arms to the Khmer Rouge, to a strategy to turn Cambodia from a "battlefield into a marketplace."

Tokyo's policy is a revival of the "Fukuda Doctrine," presented by then Japanese Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda in 1977, to integrate the non-communist ASEAN countries and Indochina after the Vietnam War. Kaifu told *The Nation* April 30 that "Japan thinks it is important to bring the war-ravaged Indochina region into the dynamic economic development occurring in Asia." The 1977 effort, which was never endorsed by Washington, was disrupted by Vietnam's December 1978 invasion of Cambodia.

## Hun Sen to Tokyo

Accordingly, at the end of April, Japan brought Hun Sen, the prime minister for the Cambodian government in Phnom Penh, to Tokyo. As Hun Sen told the story to reporters upon his return: "I went to Tokyo because of health problems. That is, the Japanese government, knowing about the illness that I experienced in Paris in December 1990, made a humanitarian gesture by inviting me to have a medical checkup there. . . . Also during my stay . . . I had fruitful talks with the Japanese foreign minister and other Foreign Ministry officials, as well as with the Diet Speaker and members of various parties in the Diet. Our discussion focused on the search for a solution to the Cambodian problem. I observe that at present Japan is resolved to contribute to a political settlement of the Cambodian problem and has decided to help in rebuilding Cambodia

after a political solution is reached."

Specifically, Japan has been attempting to fashion a negotiating mechanism by which Phnom Penh might accept the United Nations Permanent Five—named for the five permanent members of the Security Council, United States, Soviet Union, France, Great Britain, and China—solution for Cambodia, which is backed by the Cambodian resistance factions and Beijing.

Since the formula calls for the dissolution of the Hun Sen administration, it has not been welcomed in Phnom Penh. Japan has proposed a modification by which the U.N. would dissolve only those sections of the Phnom Penh bureaucracy that might influence national elections. The Japanese plan also calls for the formation of a special committee to ensure the "non-return" of past policies of genocide—a reference to the murderous rule of the Khmer Rouge 1975-79. This amendment is also designed to remove a major sticking point of Phnom Penh.

On May 1, as the U.N.-sponsored cease-fire was just beginning in Cambodia, Prime Minister Kaifu met with leaders of the three Cambodian resistance factions, to win their approval of the modifications and their guarantees for the cease-fire. Later this month, Japanese Foreign Minister Taro Nakayama will visit Vietnam for talks on the Japanese initiative.

In discussions with all parties to the conflict, Tokyo has stressed the necessity to rebuild Cambodia's devastated economy. Thai Prime Minister Anand had told the resistance leaders before Kaifu's meeting with them that "Japan has a very important role to play not only at present but also in the future when it will be the major contributor to the rehabilitation and reconstruction of Cambodia after a peace settlement."

## Economic issues uppermost

The economy also poses a severe problem for Phnom Penh. Hun Sen admitted in an interview April 18 to columnist Jacques Beckaert that "the government has lost some productive areas in the countryside and that his government is not yet able 'to meet the needs of the population.'" Without some alleviation of the economic collapse, it is unlikely that Phnom Penh could retain control of Cambodia in any case.

The revival of the economies of Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam centers on the Mekong Delta Project, for the construction of seven dams along the Mekong River, which would provide hydropower, irrigation, and flood control. Japan has promised to become a major financial contributor to the project, which costs a total of \$11 billion. Interestingly, Beijing, site of the upper reaches of the Mekong, has said that once a settlement in Cambodia is reached, it will join the Mekong Interim Committee for work on the project. Heretofore, China, which has recently asked Tokyo for \$4 billion in development loans, had been cool to any plans for cooperation on the Mekong.