

Anti-Colonial ‘Spirit Of Bandung’ Revived

by Mike Billington

Fifty years ago, 29 nations of Asia and Africa met in Bandung, Indonesia, for an Asian-African Summit, described by its host, Indonesian President Sukarno, as the first meeting of former colonial peoples without the presence of representatives from the colonial powers. From this meeting, in 1955, emerged the “Spirit of Bandung,” which contributed to the rapid conclusion of the decolonization of Africa and Asia, and the founding a few years later of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). From April 22-24, 2005, representatives from over 100 nations, including over 50 heads of state, met in Jakarta, and in Bandung, for the first major meeting of Asian and African nations since that famous 1955 Conference.

In 1955, the challenges facing the de-colonized nations were formidable. But the leaders were not oriented only to their own internal problems, but rather, perceived their crucial role, as non-aligned nations, in preventing the Cold War (which had already provided the British with a smokescreen for reoccupying the colonies lost during the war) from becoming a new world war. President Sukarno, in his opening speech, asked: “What can we do? We can do much! We can inject the voice of reason into world affairs.”

Most importantly, Sukarno singled out the best from America’s history, speaking about the American Revolution as “the first successful anti-colonialist war in history,” but also noting: “That battle, which began 180 years ago, is not yet completely won.”

A New Colonialism

The crisis facing the world today is far worse than that of 1955. In the words of former Indonesian Foreign Minister Ali Alatas: “Although the 1955 Bandung Spirit had inspired Asian and African countries to obtain their independence, 50 years later many nations of the two continents still had no economic freedom. Political independence without economic independence can in no way free the teeming millions of the developing world from the poverty trap they are in.”

While the host of the Bandung Conference in 1955 called on the American revolutionary spirit to guide them, today the participants were compelled to resolve on “the need for countries to strictly abide by the principle of international law, in particular the Charter of the United Nations”—a clear reference to the U.S. policy of pre-emptive war, and the Bush Administration’s de-

fiance of international law. Also, while extolling the formal independence of the former colonized world, the Declaration notes “we have not yet attained commensurate progress in the social and economic spheres.” Indeed, the Conference was held in the midst of an economic and financial crisis threatening to explode the dollar-based system upon which the fragile economies of the developing nations depend.

And yet the Conference itself was an expression of both the recognition of the severity of the world crisis, demanding the unity of the nations of Asia and Africa, and of hope that solutions can be found. They created a “New Asian-African Strategic Partnership” (NAASP), to coordinate cooperative efforts covering political, economic, and social relations, with a summit of heads of state to be held every four years, and ministerial meetings regularly.

The new “Spirit of Bandung,” however, was more evident on the sidelines of the meeting than in the formal sessions and communiqués. Getting together as national leaders, independent of the new colonial lords of globalization and pre-emptive war in Washington and London, provides the opportunity for what Sukarno called “the voice of reason in world affairs.”

Several crucial examples: For the past several weeks, thousands of Chinese carried out raucous and destructive demonstrations in several Chinese cities against Japanese government and business institutions. The cause was identified as Japan’s continued failure to treat the history of the wartime occupation of China honestly in school books, or to fully apologize—although they may have had more to do



Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi (left) and Chinese President Hu Jintao took advantage of the Bandung conference of Asian and African leaders to deal with their recent crisis and pledged cooperation on development issues.

with China's concern over Japan's possible support for the recently increasing U.S. confrontational approach toward China. At the Asian-African Summit, Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi issued a "heartfelt apology" for the wartime actions, and held a private meeting with Chinese President Hu Jintao, arranging for a series of follow-up meetings between officials. Those factions, in both countries, which see the urgency of united actions for development in the current global crisis, took the lead. (See accompanying article.)

Similarly, with the tensions on the Korean peninsula increasing, as the Bush Administration has attempted to force South Korea to accept U.S. dictates and insults to the North (including even the issuance of contingency plans for war), the leaders of North and South Korea used the opportunity of the New Bandung Spirit to hold two meetings in Indonesia—the first since 2000. South Korean Prime Minister Lee Hae-chan met briefly on April 22 with North Korea's official head of state, Kim Yong Nam, to discuss joint efforts to preserve ancient Korean historical sites and to unite to counter Japanese claims on the islets. A second meeting was held on April 23 to discuss the stalled six-party talks.

The only explicitly political complaint agreed to by all participants in the final Declaration was in regard to Palestine. Representing the sentiment of over three-fourths of the world's populations, it stated: "We express our abhorrence that, fifty years since the 1955 Bandung Conference, the Palestinian people remain deprived of their right to independence."

Economic Defense

There were also discussions of "south-south" economic cooperation. The emerging role of China as a foreign investor in developing nations was evident, as China is trying to find useful things to do with its huge dollar reserves. President Hu Jintao stayed over in Indonesia for a two-day state visit following the Bandung Conference, signing a declaration for a "strategic partnership" between the two nations. This includes plans to triple trade within three years, to \$20 billion, and infrastructure investments of \$300 million. Indonesian Economics Minister Aburizal Bakrie reported before the Conference that China planned to invest \$10 billion in Indonesia over the coming years.

This Chinese-Indonesian agreement follows the similar, but even more historic, accords between India and China during a summit in New Delhi on April 9-12.

President Hu will be travelling to the Philippines after his Indonesian visit, where investment contracts worth \$1.5 billion will be signed, including the construction of a power plant, rail development north and south of Manila, and oil exploration off the Palawan Islands.

Asian and African leaders pledged to vastly increase trade and development between the two continents, as a means of countering the impact of globalization.