

Crisis in the Asia-Pacific: Stop Repression, Build Solidarity

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This talk was presented to the Asia-Pacific Solidarity Conference, Sydney, April 9-13 by Jayanta Rongpi, member of the Indian parliament representing the Autonomous State Demand Committee, Assam and Communist Party of India-ML (Liberation).

1. The Asia-Pacific region continues to be home to some of the world's most hated repressive regimes like the Suharto regime in Indonesia. At the same time, the region is also home to some of the world's most durable and vibrant movements for democracy. Such repressive regimes however do not just survive on their own - more often than not, they are propped up by imperialist powers, the US in particular, with Australia serving as a crucial ally as in Indonesia today and Vietnam earlier.

2. The phenomenon of imperialist-sponsored repression however pervades almost the entire region. We have seen that imperialism has managed to protect and preserve its interests on a long-term basis in spite of periods of intense popular agitation culminating in the overthrow of despotic regimes like the Marcos regime in the Philippines.

Even in India, institutionalised repression of democratic movements and denial of basic democratic rights and human dignity of large sections of the people is a hard reality. Police firing on unarmed people is an everyday occurrence and certain provinces are virtually under military rule. In a province like Bihar, private armies of upper caste feudal landlords massacre the rural poor with impunity.

3. The question of repression today is organically and inextricably linked to the imperialist agenda of economic neo-liberalism. Without large-scale repression such an economic program cannot be imposed on the deprived and super-exploited people of Asia, whether in India or Indonesia, the Philippines or Pakistan. In other words, with the globalisation of the world capitalist economy we are also witnessing globalisation of repression.

Let this conference boldly raise the banner of globalisation of solidarity and resistance against imperialist globalisation of plunder and repression.

4. Movements for national self-determination remain another key target of state repression in several countries of the Asia-Pacific region. The process of nation-building is facing serious obstacles in most cases from stubborn feudal and colonial remnants. The process is also distorted and vitiated enormously by imperialist intervention.

5. To talk about India, the threat of repression has assumed much more serious proportions with the ongoing rightward shift in the polity. The saffron brigade represented in the political arena by BJP is rightly characterised by progressive and democratic forces in India as a vehicle of what we call communal fascism. The memories of large-scale anti-Muslim violence following the demolition of the Babri Mosque in Ayodhya are still quite fresh.

Contrary to media propaganda, the BJP does not represent any kind of nationalist or oriental resurgence against Western domination. If anything, the rise of BJP marks an aggressive revival of forces of medieval barbarity and rabid reaction. In spite of its nationalist rhetoric, the BJP has got excellent relations with the so-called Western custodians of civilisation, modernity and democracy. In fact, the BJP's strident anti-Muslim and anti-communist stance fits in perfectly with the requirements of the US foreign policy which has identified the Islamic and Chinese civilisations as the main threat for an allegedly beleaguered Western civilisation.

6. The role of Australia is very crucial in the emerging context of the Asia-Pacific. The official policy of successive Australian governments has earned for Australia the dubious distinction of being the last white or Western outpost on the frontiers of the East. Whether in Vietnam, Indonesia, East Timor or Gulf War, the Australian ruling class has always extended vigorous all-out support to US imperialism.

But because of its unique geo-political location, Australia is also capable of playing a different role to a different effect. This is probably why the American foreign policy ideologue Samuel P. Huntington has cited Australia as a case of torn civilisation, a country with a dichotomous identity.

While the Western powers and the Australian ruling class will obviously try to pull Australia with the West, as a crucial ally in carrying out the global game-plan of US imperialism, the task of the Australian left and progressive forces all over the Asia-Pacific is equally obvious.

We must do all we can to develop active links of solidarity and resistance and collectively thwart the American and Western game-plan and overthrow repressive regimes in the region which continue to survive with the blessings of the West.

I hope this conference in Sydney will mark an encouraging step forward in this direction.