

Three cheers for alternative ASEAN games!

THE NON-EVENT RECENTLY HELD IN Vientiane that was meant to be the latest ASEAN meeting, turned out to be a comedy of errors in more ways than one. First came the laughable drama of Thailand's premier, Thaksin Shinawatra, playing the *prima donna* threatening to walk out of the proceedings should any pesky journalists or politicians raise the embarrassing question of what actually happened in the town of Tak Bai where more than eighty Thai Muslims died at the hands of Thailand's security forces. Then equally shamelessly Thailand chastised the Burmese regime saying it was not doing enough as far as democratic reform was concerned.

In the spirit of ASEAN fraternity, brotherhood and wishy-washiness; and in order to loosen the collars of the high-and-mighty who grace this tedious spectacle again and again, we propose an alternative ASEAN games for the leaders and governments themselves. Unbeknownst to most of us (with the exception of a few sharp-sighted political scientists, of course), these games have, in fact, been going on for decades and the countries of ASEAN have been competing against each other all along. Among the competitions on offer include:

Competition 1: The bury-as-many-of-your-own-population race:

The aim is for the governments of ASEAN countries to massacre as many of their own citizens on the flimsiest of pretexts as they can. Excuses for rampant slaughter and genocide may include: "the struggle against communism", "national security", "danger of secessionist movement", "internal revolt", "local gangs and mafia networks undermining national security and the territorial integrity of the nation-state".

Thus far Indonesia has been the clear winner, with an estimated half a million killed during the anti-communist counter-putsch in 1965-66. (It was later disqualified from the competition when it was discovered that the anti-communist bloodbath was partly aided by the Americans and other Western powers.)

Following it are the Philippines and Thailand, both with an equally impressive and bloody record of murdering their own citizens in the name of anti-communism and counter-insurgency. Again both countries had to be disqualified when it was discovered that they were (again!) aided and abetted by the United States of America.

Therefore the first prize goes to Cambodia whose killing fields are the pride of ASEAN and where thousands of unmarked graves remain undiscovered. The Khmer Rouge were responsible for the deaths of more than a million innocent people. Coming a close second is Burma, which has also chalked up an impressive record of killing its own citizens following the army *coup* in 1963. In both these cases, the huge body counts were achieved purely by local initiative, without the help of Uncle

VIEW



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Sam. (See what hard work can achieve? Let that be a lesson to other ASEAN governments).

Competition 2: The twist-your-neck-and-look-the-other-way-as-long-as-you-can race.

The objective of this race is for the governments of ASEAN to turn their necks and look the other way, even when the most flagrant abuses of human rights and fundamental liberties are taking place right next door. While performing this feat, the leaders of the states also have to continually chant the mantra 'we will not interfere in the domestic affairs of other states, we will not interfere in the domestic affairs of other states, we will not interfere in the domestic affairs of other states'...

The leaders in this race thus far have been Malaysia and Singapore. Both have managed to look the other way when abuse of human rights takes place right before their eyes, in places like Patani, Aceh, East Timor and Irian etc. Malaysia gets a bonus point thanks to its amazing ability to

describe the happenings in Patani as a 'foreign domestic problem', even as the so-called foreign country (Thailand) happens to be a stone's throw away across the Golok River.

The Philippines while remaining oblivious to the problems on its own territory — namely the killings in Mindanao and the brutal conduct of its own army — has been disqualified because it kept looking at the problems of other countries in ASEAN.

Competition 3: The run-to-the-doorstep-of-the-White House-with-begging-bowl-in-hand 1,000-kilometre dash.

The objective of this race is for the leaders of ASEAN to rush to the doorstep of the White House, begging bowl in hand, to win American support while proclaiming commitment to Washington's 'war on terror' in Asia. In the course of doing so, the ASEAN countries have to forget and erase America's record of violent and bloody intervention in Asia.

The outright is Thailand, which has now been designated a 'major non-NATO ally' by none other than President Bush Jr himself. Thailand was one of the first countries in ASEAN to lend its support to the American 'war on terror' campaign. Thus far this seems to have paid dividends in terms of the near-total lack of American media coverage of the violence in Patani and the rest of southern Thailand. Coming a close second is the Philippines under the leadership of Gloria Arroyo, who has trampled on the post-1986 post-Marcos constitution of the country which specifically prohibits the Philippine government from allowing foreign troops to operate on Filipino soil.

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The games were conducted in earnest and all the participants stated later that they had had a jolly good time. Throughout the event the representatives of ASEAN were colourfully dressed in traditional ASEAN dress: that is, Levis jeans and cowboy hats. Numerous American fast food companies were the proud sponsors of the games and have promised to sponsor the next round of collective lunacy...

(The account is dedicated to the memory of the founding fathers of ASEAN, whose noble dreams of building an ASEAN of the people, by the people and for the people have been so shamelessly betrayed.)

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