

INDIAN OCEAN REGION

There have been signs of a possible thaw in the conflict between the two giants in the region, China and India. Observers predict that the visit of the Chinese table tennis team to Calcutta might be the beginning of moves to normalise relations.

The visit of President Bhutto to Washington, produced the lifting of the embargo on arms supply to Pakistan. The embargo was placed during the Bangladesh war in 1971. U. S. and Chinese arms since that date to Pakistan have totalled \$225 million, and Soviet sales to India of advanced weaponry amount to \$1200 million. U. S. supply of arms to Pakistan raised protests in India where Foreign Minister Chavan cancelled a visit to Washington. Observers feel that the U. S. will balance the situation by increasing food aid to India.

The heightening armaments race is increasing the instability in the region, while the precarious situation in Bangladesh is no help.

Pakistan's move to obtain arms has been hastened by the increasing strength of India in consolidating power in Kashmir through the return of Sheik Abdullah, the "Lion of Kashmir" as Chief Minister. The increasing influence of the Soviet Union in Afghanistan is also apparently adding to Pakistan's insecurity in the light of the close Indo-Soviet relationships.

Further South, in Singapore, Foreign Minister Rajaratnam is visiting China and it is possible that diplomatic arrangements for recognition would be the result. This would leave Indonesia as the only country in the entire region to avoid a closer relationship with China.

Closer home, in the Maldives, Prime Minister Zaki has been deposed. He was known to be very keen on developing relationships between his country and Sri Lanka.

It seems clear, however, that the historical and linguistic ties between the two nations will continue regardless of the change in regime.

The Maldives coup was matched on the western side by the changes in Madagascar. Colonel Andriamanazato who took over after the assassination of Colonel Ratsimandrara, is known to be opposed to the establishment of foreign bases in the region. At least this should provide a respite to the worsening military situation developing in the Eastern and Southern parts of the Indian Ocean. All these recent developments in the region make it clear that Diego Garcia is perhaps only a beginning. The demand for a neutral Indian Ocean remains more urgent than ever before.

CAMBODIA

The siege of Phnom Penh by the forces of the Royal Government of the National Union of Cambodia has brought defeat closer to the American imposed regime of Marshal Lon Nol. The people's army led by Khieu Samphan has succeeded in isolating Phnom Penh and cutting off the Mekong River supply line from South Vietnam. The result has been a massive airlift of ammunition and food to the besieged capital by U. S. aircraft. D. C. 8 and C. 130 aircraft have been ferrying 45 tons a time of ammunition to Pochentnoy airport which is within the reach of the rockets of the Samphan/Sihanouk led forces. It is estimated that the present airlift is not enough to keep the Lon Nol regime going for long and foreign nationals have been advised to leave the capital. The Lonlites hope to hold out till the rainy season which begins in June, so that the Mekong floods make it once again possible to open the water route from South Vietnam. In the meantime leading members of the Lon Nol government, including Lon Nol himself, his Prime Minister Long Boret and his brother Lon Non are leaving Phnom Penh. They, presumably under American pressure;

are desperately trying to find a way out of their deteriorating situation.

The strategy of the Samphan attack seems to be not to take the capital by military manoeuvres but rather to use political slogans and appeals to the people of the city. It is a continuation of Giap's theory of People's War, "confronted by an aggressor enemy with powerful armed forces we could not rely on our armed forces to defeat him but rather have to rely on the forces of all the people".

Meanwhile, President Ford has asked the U. S. Congress for a \$300 million to Thieu in South Vietnam. Congress has so far not approved these votes, but it is likely that a compromise figure will be reached. At the same time Norodom Sihanouk has offered to negotiate with the U. S. A. Though the Americans have not responded to this offer the fall of Phnom Penh, Western observers feel, is only a matter of time. The fall of Phnom Penh will result in Cambodia coming under the control of the patriotic forces and further weakening of the Thieu regime in South Vietnam.

AFRICA

The Lome Convention signed in Togo on February 28th between the EEC, African, Caribbean and South Pacific countries grants access to the latter's industrial goods on a duty free basis, to the EEC. Similarly 96% of duties on farm products are waived. The agreement also creates a stabilisation fund to compensate the exporting countries from a fall in market prices. The agreement reflects the keen and sustained efforts by the EEC to retain and expand its economic relationship with Africa against the increasing competition from the U. S. A. and U. S. S. R. The European countries have the initial advantage of the historical colonial connections in the regions and apparently plan to exploit the linguistic and artificial cultural connections to their maxi-