

An isolated Patten's new faux pas

WHEN Archbishop Desmond Tutu won the Nobel Peace Prize, the then racist government of South Africa did not write to the Nobel Committee decrying the committee's decision or condemning its recipient.

Even the military junta which illegally holds power in Burma refused to sink to the lowest depths and protest to the Nobel Committee for awarding the Peace Prize to Aung San Suu Kyi, however much it would have hated the committee and her for this international publicity.

But Hong Kong's Governor Chris Patten does not mind such adverse publicity as long as he is somewhere on centre stage. He apparently believes in that old Madison Avenue principle that any publicity is good publicity, particularly now that he has been reduced to a colonial non-entity.

He did what neither the racist white minority government of South Africa nor the hated military junta in Burma did not do. Governor Patten wrote a scathing letter to the American Bar Association for making its 1995 International Human Rights Award to Democratic Party leader Martin Lee for his stand on the Court of Final Appeal.

It was a diplomatic *faux pas*. Mr Patten's initial comments on hearing of the award, deriding the American Bar Association for its so-called ignorance about Hong Kong, earned him a stunning rebuke from a former US attorney-general Dick Thornburgh.

While such a diplomatic gaffe is inexcusable, it is understandable coming from Governor Patten. He did just that at last month's French National Day party when he broke with tradition and spoke in French while replying to the toast.

Only a person thoroughly insensitive to international and local opinion would have chosen that occasion to depart from tradition by speaking in French.

France was under severe international criticism at the time for its decision to resume nuclear tests. When the Governor arrived for the Bastille Day reception he was met by protesters. Yet he decided to behave like the proverbial bull in the China shop, immediately earning critical comments from some diplomats present at the reception.



By Neville de Silva
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Perhaps Governor Patten has, unknown to most, been getting tuition in diplomatic behaviour from his friend Zhou Nan, head of the Hong Kong branch of Xinhua or from Beijing itself.

Governor Patten's protest to the American Bar Association reminds us of the barrage by Beijing when the Nobel Prize Committee awarded the 1989 Peace Prize to the Dalai Lama.

Clutching at straws

If Governor Patten was trying to emulate the Beijing authorities with whom the British have struck a new deal, suddenly abandoning all those grave warnings he issued earlier on why the CFA should be functioning before 1997, he couldn't have done better.

Mr Patten denies the deal violates the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law. But the agreement takes away the discretion of the court to select the judges as stated in the two documents.

Be that as it may, it seems the Governor has enough time to enter into disputes with foreign organisations, but cannot spare the time to respond to queries raised here in Hong Kong about his administration.

As he becomes more and more marginalised without any real forum to express his views, he is grabbing at every straw to keep himself politically alive.

Now he has carved out a niche in radio with RTHK — that tattered remnant of colonialism, providing him with a regular platform.

While we will deal with RTHK's racist partialities at another time, why is it that neither Governor Patten nor his many mouthpieces that have outlets such as the RTHK and GIS, don't answer our questions?

We have asked several times now about the blatant nepotism and discrimination residing at the very heart of the Legal Aid Department.

Governor Patten wants to educate the American Bar Association on Hong Kong's rule of law.

His homilies might have been more profitably directed at the Conservative Party government which he served.

It violated international embargoes by permitting British firms to sell arms and other materials to Saddam Hussein.

And what of the British police which it was proved perverted justice in several so-called IRA cases? Were any officers convicted for such conspiracy?

Over to you, Mr Patten.