



Nagorik Sanghati and Green Voice form a human chain at Shahbagh in the city yesterday protesting the move to evict indigenous people from Phulbari in the name of extraction of coal.

Developing nations adopt resolution on UN reforms

AFP, United Nations

Against strong opposition from rich nations, developing countries adopted a divisive resolution that could delay crucial UN management reforms and spawn a crippling budget crisis.

The resolution, which called for several new reports on the reforms and insisted on prior review by the General Assembly of any changes to budget practices, was passed in a key budget committee with 108 in favour, 50 against and three abstentions.

The resolution was presented by South Africa on behalf of 132 developing nations -- the so-called Group of 77 -- and China, and was strongly opposed by the main contributors to the UN budget, including the United States, Japan, European countries, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea and Israel.

The outcome broke a 20-year tradition in the General Assembly's 5th committee of reaching decisions by consensus rather than by a vote.

At issue is what developing nations perceive as a bid by the US-led main contributors to transfer some of the oversight and budgetary powers from the 191-member General Assembly to the 15-member Security Council and the UN Secretariat.

Wealthy countries, which contribute 85 percent of the UN budget, argued that the text would block management reforms proposed by Secretary General Kofi Annan.

"The United States is committed to pursuing necessary management reforms to ensure that the United Nations remains an effective, efficient, transparent and accountable organisation," US ambassador John Bolton said. "As such the United States has

joined with many other member states in voting no against the resolution."

"We believe in the right of every member state to have an equal say in the decision-making of this organisation. This right for us is not dependent on the financial contribution of member states to the budget of the organisation," said South African Ambassador Dumisani Kumalo said on behalf of the G-77.

"This is why we have been very vocal in wanting to protect the nature of this body and particularly the oversight role of the United Nations, especially the General Assembly," he added.

Through his spokesman, Annan expressed deep regret at the failure to reach consensus on his management reform proposals.

He urged member states "to seek to work together to rebuild the spirit of mutual trust that underpins consensus and is essential to the smooth functioning of the United Nations."

Speaking on behalf of the 25-member European Union, Austrian Ambassador Gerhard Pfanzeller expressed regret that his last-minute bid to seek a compromise with Kumalo to avert a divisive vote had failed.

"The EU expressed deep concern about tabling a proposal which is not based on consensus," he said. France's UN envoy Jean-Marc de la Sabliere concurred, saying: "It is a sad day. This is also a victory for the radicals."

Manmohan to meet Hurriyat next week

REUTERS, New Delhi

Kashmiri separatists will meet Prime Minister Manmohan Singh next week before he heads for the revolt-hit region to discuss possible solutions to the conflict.

Singh will hold talks with representatives of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference, a conglomerate of two dozens Kashmiri separatist groups, on May 3, an official statement said.

The meeting precedes Singh's planned round-table in Srinagar later the same month.

The talks are being seen as an ice-breaker after the Hurriyat decided to stay away from the first attempt at an inclusive dialogue,

held in New Delhi in February. The group reasoned that the government had not done enough to improve the lives of Kashmiris.

Hurriyat leaders have not committed themselves to attending the Srinagar conference.

"Hurriyat is for talks," its leader, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, told Reuters. "When we started the talks two years ago, it was supposed to be a continuous process."

He said that next week's meeting with the prime minister "should not be linked" to the proposed talks in Srinagar. "We are not against the round-table but we will not be part of a crowd," he said.

