

Make the Referendum a Big Success

People of Bangladesh will once again go to polls to express their opinion and exercise their fundamental democratic right. They will be participating in a referendum to put the final seal of approval in the change-over from the presidential to the parliamentary form of government. The 12th Constitution Amendment Bill which has already been unanimously passed by the parliament, will now face the verdict of the people as it is required by our Constitution.

There is no doubt in anybody's mind as to the fact that the Amendment will receive the requisite "yes" vote to complete the process of the change-over. But the question that is agitating the public mind is how large will be the "yes" vote in favour of the Amendment. There is a genuine fear of a very low turn out on the day of the referendum. The fear is based on the fact that no effective campaign is being carried out on the issue by the major political parties. It is a typical case of everybody (except those on the political fringe) being in favour of it and, therefore, nobody is actually working for it. Meaning that since all political parties represented in the parliament support the bill, the assumption is that all their supporters will automatically come to vote in the referendum. The reality is hardly that simple. Getting voters to come out to vote is as much a reflection of the gravity of the issue as it is a matter of organising the voters to come to vote. In normal circumstances, the political parties, for their own interest, do everything to mobilise the public and undertake the task to get the voters to the polling booths. This is not happening in this case.

Competing with the referendum is the by-election which will be held for 11 seats to the parliament on 11 September, four days before the referendum. The by-elections are occupying the centre-stage in the minds of the two big political parties — BNP and AL — who would have normally played the leading role in getting the voters out for the referendum. For them the by-elections are far more important. For the BNP it provides another chance to prove their superior standing with the people as they did the last time. If not superior, they are out to prove that their popularity has in no way eroded because of the way they have run the country since winning the elections. AL, on the other hand, considers the by-elections as an opportunity to register their rising popularity, in case there is any. So for both, the by-elections and not the referendum is the real challenge. And in all this the all-important referendum is getting side tracked.

We share the concern of the smaller parties that a low turn out will erode the Constitutional Amendment of some of the moral authority that its unanimous adoption in the parliament gave it. Though the referendum is a mere formality but it is a formality that contains tremendous moral and ethical value. A massive turn out and resounding "yes" vote will give the new form of government a prestige and standing that — we hope — no future party or leader will ever dream of changing.

We therefore ask the people to take the referendum with the seriousness that it deserves, and urge them to campaign actively for its success. By going to the referendum we are once again acknowledging the superiority of the will of the people above everything else. But the strength of that 'will' becomes eroded when it shows that only a fraction of the total voters participated in expressing that 'will'. The referendum is also a very important public education process. Through it the voters become aware of their democratic rights and also of their obligation as citizens of a free country. We must all, therefore, work together to make the referendum a big success.

Election in Singapore

In most countries a ruling party will be more than happy to capture 77 out of 81 seats in the parliament during a national election. But it is not so in Singapore where the authorities usually aim at 100 per cent success in all their benches.

In the election held last week, the ruling People's Action Party (PAP) saw its number of popular vote go down from 63 per cent won in 1988 to 61 per cent. While the opposition which had only one seat in the parliament in 1988 captured four. By international standard the ruling party has indeed won a landslide victory. Unfortunately, Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong has publicly admitted of being "alarmed" over what has been described as a setback of the ruling party. In his view foreign investors who contribute a great deal to the economy of Singapore will now take a deep breath before putting in more capital and technology into the island state. However, most analysts even inside Singapore do not share Mr. Goh's concern.

One may interpret the prime minister's statements in different ways. For one thing, there is a clear evidence that nothing short of total control over the parliament would satisfy the ruling party. This had been the case in the past and is likely to be so in future. It seems that PAP would not accept the fact that the presence of a sizeable opposition inside the parliament is essential for the effective functioning of the multi-party system. Yet another concern relates to the future political direction of the Goh administration. It is likely to go for a more open society, as promised by the prime minister before the polls, or a tighter control over possible political dissent in the city republic.

Last but not the least, Prime Minister Goh may be slightly concerned over his own future as the head of the government. It is a public knowledge throughout the region that Lee Hsien Loong, the deputy prime minister, what is more important, the son of former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, will eventually succeed Mr. Goh. The timing of the change-over remains a matter of speculation. There is no doubt that if Mr. Goh stumbles too often he may be obliged to vacate the seat for the son of Mr. Lee Kuan Yew. Coming months will provide the region with a better insight into the future of Singapore than it has today.

As Foreign Ministers from Non-aligned Movement (NAM) countries meet in the Ghanaian capital Accra to assess the relevance of non-alignment in the post-cold war world, the spectre of the Movement falling apart is very real.

The Movement was founded in 1961 by President Josip Tito of Yugoslavia, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Indian Prime Minister, and President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt to organise developing countries in the post-colonial age.

Supporters of non-alignment claim that with membership of 102 countries it is the world's biggest political movement.

Non-alignment was conceived at the Afro-Asian conference in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955. The first summit was held in Belgrade in 1961. Since then summits have been held in Cairo (1964), Lusaka (1970), Algiers (1973), Colombo (1976), Havana (1979), New Delhi (1983), Harare (1986) and Belgrade (1989).

The concept of non-alignment took shape during the Cold War, when the newly independent countries of Asia and Africa tried to eschew bloc politics and create a third force in international politics.

Now that the Cold War has formally been consigned to history, what relevance does NAM have? In what President George Bush calls the new world order, the concept of non-alignment has come under scrutiny. Against whom are they non-aligned when the world is no longer polarised between two ideological power blocs?

For the Third World, the ideology of non-alignment is to promote international understanding through peaceful

THE United Nations is proposing to unmask the multi-billion-dollar global arms trade which has traditionally been shrouded in a veil of mystery.

A group of governmental experts assigned to carry out a study on the international transfer of conventional weapons has recommended that the United Nations immediately establish a register where every arms sale in the world will be recorded.

The proposal, which already has the blessings of the world's seven major industrial nations, will require both the arms buyer and the arms seller to notify the United Nations of the sale.

At the recent London summit of the leaders of the world's seven most industrialised countries — the United States, Britain, France, Canada, Germany, Italy and Japan — the group unanimously endorsed the idea of an arms register aimed at making public all weapons sales and transfers.

Five of the seven, with the exception of Japan and Canada, are major arms exporters

NON-ALIGNMENT IN AN AGE OF REALIGNMENT

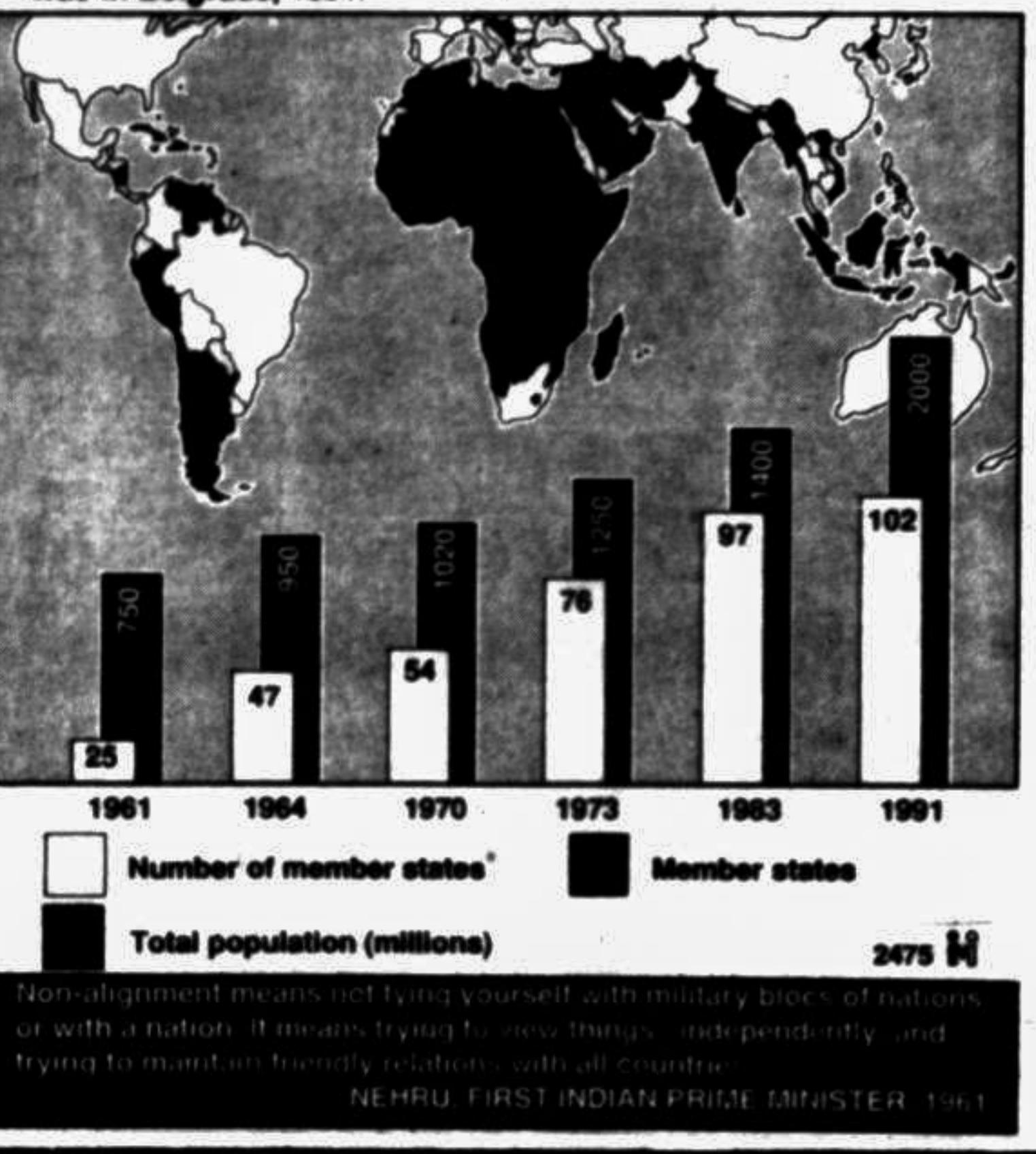
The South in Search of a New Role

by Daya Kishan Thussu

Foreign Ministers from more than 100 countries in the Non-aligned Movement are meeting in Accra to lay the diplomatic groundwork for the non-aligned heads of state and governments summit scheduled for 1992. The ministers will have to grapple with daunting tasks and devise a constructive role for the Movement to make its voice heard in what President Bush calls the new world order.

The Non-aligned Movement

Non-aligned Movement was conceived at Afro-Asian conference in Bandung, Indonesia, 1955. 29 nations attended. First summit was in Belgrade, 1961.



Non-alignment means not tying yourself with military blocs of nations or with a nation. It means trying to do new things independently and trying to maintain friendly relations with all countries.

NEHRU, FIRST INDIAN PRIME MINISTER, 1961

Disarmament

Unmasking the Arms Trade

accounting for over 70 per cent of the global arms trade.

The United Nations has estimated that global military spending, a sizeable proportion of which includes arms sales, totals over one trillion dollars annually.

The expert group, which is preparing a detailed report on the proposal for the UN General Assembly sessions this month, points out that one of the more visible features of the international arms trade is that it is "often cloaked in secrecy."

As weapons are tools designed to eventually kill and destroy, the experts argue, the arms trade should not be driven merely by economic and commercial considerations.

UN Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar, one of the strongest advocates of the

proposal, said recently that several member states had told him they would favour entrusting the world body with the task of maintaining such a register.

"Needless to say, the

United States stands ready to take on this responsibility and to promote a reduction of the arms trade by every means deemed appropriate," he added.

Conscious of possible attempts to circumvent the register, Perez de Cuellar also said

that a similar effort should be made with respect to the sale and transfer of military technology.

This is an issue, he noted which has yet to be adequately explored and on which it might prove less difficult to conclude an agreement.

"As the saying goes, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," he said, adding that "in the new order which we are striving to build, it is better to try to prevent an

arms build-up than to have to control it through the use of armed force."

The Secretary-General said he was aware that more countries were now exporting arms than ever before purely for economic reasons. Some of these arms exporters, he said, were experiencing economic problems that make it difficult for them to resist pressures from their military/industrial complexes.

One of the countries he singled out was Czechoslovakia which has officially decided to curb arms exports.

"Perhaps not all of them will have the courage of Czechoslovakia, one of the major producers in the world, which has just announced that it will stop exporting arms,"

place at a time when the Movement is suffering not only a crisis of direction, but also of leadership.

Yugoslavia is on the brink of a civil war which threatens the very existence of the state so assiduously built by Tito.

At this crucial time, India is unable to provide the leadership to the movement that Nehru gave, while it struggles with its own acute political and economic problems.

Egypt, the third pillar, is seen to be too closely identified with the US to provide a lead to the Movement.

When the US is shaping its version of a new world order, it is imperative for the world's poor, most of whom live in the non-aligned countries, to group together and keep in check the exploitation — not least ecological — of the Third World.

Despite its record, the Non-aligned Movement is still the only grouping that, by virtue of its numerical superiority in UN organisations, can put the South's interests onto the global agenda.

In addition, a key role for the Movement is to promote South-South co-operation and regional co-operation for economic and political stability.

At a time when the artificial division of the world politics into East and West is over, the distinction between the rich North and poor South is becoming increasingly clear. These are the issues with which the non-aligned leaders will have to grapple at their meeting in Accra. — GEMINI NEWS SERVICE

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The Secretary-General added. The United Nations regularly published a detailed breakdown of military budgets from member states. But since the entire exercise is voluntary, only about 30 to 40 countries out of the 150 member states, feel obliged to provide the data to the world body.

The proposed arms register is expected to be based on the following broad characteristics:

— The register should be so designed as to permit its prompt implementation.

— Participation should be universal, including both arms suppliers and recipients.

— The parameters should be such as to allow standardised and comparable input from all states.

— It should be so designed and maintained as to provide meaningful information, mindful of its purpose to build confidence, promote restraint in arms transfers and allow timely identification of trends in arms transfers.

— It should have a potential to expand to more comprehensive coverage if required.

OPINION

Culture, Tradition and Human Relation

Naz Shafinaz

Citizens of all nations, and Bangladesh is not an exception, are rightfully proud of their heritage, culture and tradition. For that matter, the people of the Indian sub-continent take a special pride in their long history — their glory and conquests, the excellence of their rich literature, wealth of their music, opulence of their art and architecture.

Almost anyone, specially one with scholarly leaning, given an opportunity and having a willing listener will entrance him with an unending paean to the ancient glory of their history. He will also make it a point and emphasize that they are the inheritors of greatness and were a civilized nation when the West was primitive.

The idea and sense of being heirs of a great culture pervades all spheres of the society. Thus, in any literary magazine or in the literary section of a newspaper — the theme of cultural wealth and superiority is discussed in minute and scholarly details in a fine and flowery language endlessly. Similarly, often there are discussions of our literature, music or culture on television — generally these discussions are carried out by well known scholars who give opinions on various fine points of our rich literature or music in a high class language which is of interest or are comprehensible to only other scholars, thereby, driving away viewers in droves — who would rather watch a Western action serial or some social drama.

I have no complaints with this obsessive pride in our ancient culture or rich tradition — as a matter of fact, I am rather proud of it. But, what is incongruous and disturbing is that for a people who are steeped in history and endowed with a rich culture and tradition — act and behave in less than civilized manner in their daily lives and in their interaction with other fellow human beings. It is entirely possible that the culture and tradition that is incessantly discussed in the literary papers or in the drawing rooms

of the genteel and privileged class or analyzed on the TV screen is different and separate than what we encounter in our daily lives. For many of us might have the mistaken idea that good manners, courtesy and respect for other's rights is a result of good culture and tradition.

The lack of good manners and ordinary courtesy is acutely evident in all aspects of our daily life here. Thus, if one takes even a casual look at the traffic on the streets and highways here, it will instantly become evident that no one pays any heed to even the most rudimentary rules of basic safe driving or even crossing the street. This is the result not only of the lack of knowledge of safe driving rules, but, also of having no consideration for other people who share the same streets and highways with them. The guilty people are not only the illiterate or the semi-literate men of village background, who drive for a living, but, also the apparently educated and affluent who have as bad and are as callous to the safety of others on the street. Rampant and unnecessary honking of horn, cutting in and out of traffic needlessly, speeding and generally endangering others are the most common practices here. Also, the fortunate few, who are ferried from their offices or important meetings in government owned or private vehicles are equally guilty. As either they do not have the time or patience to instruct their drivers to drive safely and not cause inconvenience or endanger others on the road, or they themselves are ignorant like their drivers, being the first generation to have acquired the position and privilege to seat in a lordly style, all sprawled out in the back seat of an automobile, oblivious of everything around, to be driven to whatever destination it be.

One area where we could have hoped for some decent behavior, consideration for fellow human beings are the institutions of higher learning — the traditional home of "Sanskriti, Oeyttha and Krishit". But, a look at these institutions will dispel any such notion. Our young people at the colleges and universities, who are the leaders of tomorrow and are expected to be the standard bearers and enhance and expand our "Sanskriti and Oeyttha" . . . a look at them and their activities will only present a dismaying and disgusting picture. For, not only they are not doing anything for "Sanskriti and Krishit", but, they are fighting, beating up or killing each other with impunity for whatever ill conceived, mis-guided and misunderstood ideology they have been led to believe.

An observer with any degree of objectivity, after watching everything that is going around him and being subjected to various forms of abuses mentioned — may be forgiven, if he comes to the conclusion : the heritage, culture and tradition we are so proud of an talk about is a myth and a lie.

trial Foreign Policy can help to minimise expenditure for Defence requirements.

Surrendering their arms the students must ask for an enlightened teaching programme. The colonial system will not produce 'the best among the poor'. The present system allows the rich to buy the modern 'Kindergarten' services while the vast majority are forced to receive a worn-out and defective primary education. Thus two classes are created and the English speaking 'Kindergarten' students 'rightly' consider themselves superior to those educated under the tutelage of the state!

The entire nation must follow one most scientific and unified syllabus. English should be re-introduced from primary level as a second language. Our neighbouring country India has forsaken neither patriotism nor the English language as an official medium; but we have forsaken both!

In these modern 'democratic' times, no letter or reminder is acknowledged; and the reply is posted on rare occasions. RAKUK would never commit itself; and the T & T Deptt will never indicate when the new telephone connection was likely to be effected — they would never say 'No' also.

The newly-elected Govt. would be doing a good PR job by instructing all offices to (a) acknowledge each and every communication (including reminders); and (b) communicate within two weeks (an interim reply is acceptable).

The tax payers have some rights, the civil service have some duties, and the elected representatives have some responsibilities.

We shout about our rights, and forget about the duties.

A Mawaz

Dhaka

KAFCO

Sir, Your article about Bangladesh-Japan Economic Forum published on 2 September was very interesting to