

FOCUS ON PAKISTAN

APC Campaign Against IJI Not Likely to Work

M J Zahedi writes from Karachi

THE first half of the month was dominated by the agitation in and outside Kashmir, the activities of the Opposition, particularly the All Parties Conference (APC).

provincial ally Jam Sadiq Ali seems unable to help because it is a central project and he himself is having problems with the Prime Minister, over the performance of the Sindh police. The DIG, CIA, a cousin of the Chief Minister's powerful Adviser on Home Affairs who is also the President's son-in-law, was recently suspended under instructions from the PM and an enquiry was ordered against him for alleged excesses committed on suspects, both political and non-political. The enquiry officer, head of the PM's Inspection Team, wasn't able even to make a beginning because the provincial government did not co-operate. Now the PM is said to have ordered that the enquiry be held ex parte.

only for the Nikah after which he was flown back to Karachi. He is said to be suffering from cancer of the liver for which he has recently been to England twice.

walled city. The Prime Minister, according to an unconfirmed report, maneuvered his kites from the rooftop of a house in his constituency in Lahore.

Weekly Holiday for Police

The Punjab Government is examining a proposal which Bangladesh also might find worth emulating. The proposal is to allow policemen in the province, for the first time, a weekly rest at police station level. The proposal, if accepted would give all policemen, from a constable to an inspector, a full day's rest every week. A rested policeman will be a polite policeman is one of the arguments presented in favour of the proposal. Rather fanciful, isn't it?

The multi-nationals, were said to be one of the major factors contributing to the rapid rise in the cost of medicines. These seminars apparently help the manufacturers introduce market products most of which are not needed in the country. The multinationals use the Third World's developing countries as the dumping ground for all types of medicines, some of which are not allowed to be sold even in their home countries. Some time ago a study had said that of about 7,000 medicines available in Pakistan, only about 0.4 per cent could be termed essentially required.

Government Controlled Media

Beware editors and government news managers! A judge of the Lahore High Court has directed the Federal Information Secretary to explain and answer on points raised in a petition filed by an advocate alleging that the government-controlled electronic media (Radio and TV), covered the proceedings only of the Special Courts for Speedy Trials which the government set up a few months ago under the Twelfth Amendment of the Constitution. The petitioner has complained that the policy showed that only the Special Courts were working and the other courts were not. It will be interesting to hear what the Secretary has to say because it

is for the first time that a petition about partiality in the dissemination of news has come up for judicial scrutiny in Pakistan. If the petitioner wins the case, can the analogy be also extended to the newspapers belonging to the government?

Taking about newspapers, readers who remember The Morning News of the Pakistan days may be interested to know that it is being handed over to the Adamjees, which had bought it from the Khwaja family before it had been taken over by the National Press Trust during the Ayub Khan regime. The decision follows the present government's desire to privatise the nationalised papers run by the NPT.

Lastly, Lt. Gen. (retired) Mohammad Azam Khan, the popular Governor of former East Pakistan during Ayub's martial law, has surfaced on newspaper pages after a very long time. He criticised the present government for "setting a new record of rigging in the recent Local Bodies elections" (in Punjab). He said that he had expressed his reservations about the polls even before they were held, to the Prime Minister and the Punjab Chief Minister. He warned that just as the previous governments could not survive through similar tactics, the present government too will not be able to.

A Candid Feedback

The two-day extended meeting of the policy making body of the ruling Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) ended on Wednesday with — by all accounts — a very healthy and candid feedback from the district level leaders. The fact that halfway through the exercise the chairperson herself had to intervene in favour of the party seniors and ministers, speaks of the extent to which the district BNP leaders really spoke their mind. This was no doubt the outcome of pent-up frustrations resulting from the absence of any regular channel of communication between the leaders and party workers.

Whether the two-day dialogue was a pure public relations (read fence mending) exercise, or whether the BNP leadership will take to heart what has been so bluntly conveyed to them, only the future will tell. However, the very fact that such a meeting was organised — though belatedly — speaks of the growing concern among the party high-ups and workers that the dialogue between them needs to be revamped. It is welcome development and one which, we hope, will be made into a regular feature not only for BNP but other political parties as well.

Except for the candid speeches and some strong messages emanating from the district leaders, the meeting cannot be said to have achieved much. The long awaited amendment to the party constitution from presidential to parliamentary form of government; the leadership crisis around the future role of the deputy leader of the House and the general complaint of absence of intra-party democracy remained unaddressed. The role of the party secretary general that came under severe scrutiny and the question of whether a minister should hold that office did not also merit attention. All these are supposed to be discussed in the national council session scheduled for May this year.

However, on the more important issue of new policy directions, there were some significant hints in the winding-up address of the party chairperson. There was a significant departure from the BNP practice of linking every current policy or development initiative to some action of the late President Ziaur Rahman. The BNP chief said that the world and the reality in Bangladesh had undergone dramatic changes to make mere replicating of her husband's work worthwhile. This is an important signal to her own party leaders who had grown accustomed to getting her backing by the mere mention that this or that project was conceived or supported by her late husband.

In another significant move away from the practice of making the usual ritualistic claims of what her party did during the last one year, Mrs Zia warned that people's expectations remained unfulfilled and that time was running out for the ruling party to make significant contribution in this field. Her warning to party workers not to seek favours and privileges — like wanting licences and permits — is a reflection of an increasing feeling among the public that little has changed from the past.

The gathering of leaders from districts and front organisations provided the ruling party hierarchy with a feedback that might have escaped the latter because of protocol and official rituals that seem to surround them these days. The ruling party will be well advised to pay particular attention to what their lower rank had to say, and to repeat this exercise regularly so as to have a better feel of the pulse of party workers, than they appeared to have had this time.

NAM and the World

The question that the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) has faced since the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and dissolution of the Soviet Union itself is, does it have a meaningful role to play any longer? The movement's own answer, delivered at the recent ministerial-level meeting held at Larnaca in Cyprus, was an emphatic "yes". Ironically Egypt, which was one of the co-founders of NAM along with India and Yugoslavia, differed. Despite Egypt's misgivings, it can be argued that, far from becoming irrelevant, the role NAM could play in the present, vastly-changed world scenario, has become even more crucial for developing countries.

During the Cold War, the NAM provided an umbrella and a powerful platform for those countries looking to maintain equidistance from the two rival military blocs, as well as retain independence in foreign policy formulation. But perhaps the most vital role the NAM played was at the United Nations. While the United States and the Soviet Union spared no effort to concentrate the world body's energy and resources in dealing with superpower-related geopolitical issues, the emergence of NAM as a Third Force at the UN made sure that the interests of the developing, post-colonial nations could no longer be ignored.

In a way, developing states are in a more awkward position than they were in the '60s or '70s. For those, to quote Jawaharlal Nehru, "trying to view things... independently", the emergence of a world dominated by a single mega-power is not a healthy development. Yet, the NAM, in Nehru's view, was essentially designed to allow developing states to think and act independently. That need is more pronounced today than ever before, and therefore, the existence of an effective political platform for developing countries, not necessarily to challenge the West, but to inject some balance into the new world order, is essential.

However, perhaps the advocacy role the NAM played so effectively in the not-too-distant past has now acquired an importance equal to, if not greater than, that of the movement's role as a shield against political domination by the West. There is a real and grave danger that the West's preoccupation with Eastern Europe and the former USSR may push the developing world into the background, while trade rivalry among developed states and between the West and the newly emerging economies, could seriously threaten economic prospects of the less developed countries. It is therefore essential that a unified and purposeful NAM exert enough influence and keep the agendas of the UN and its affiliated bodies focused sharply on development issues.

NEW DELHI: Quotes are sometimes good launching pads. I will start with two, both favourites of mine. The first, deep and stirring, is from Socrates: "The unexamined life is not worth living."

The second, more amusing, is Rupert Murdoch's, the Australo-American media tycoon: "Unless we can return to the principles of public service we will lose our claim to be the Fourth Estate. What right have we to speak in the public interest when all too often we are motivated by personal gain?" In the 31 years since he uttered those words Mr Murdoch has learnt a lot about personal gain and shed most of what he knew about public service.

The Indian Press, it seems to me, leads an unexamined life. Into the flourishing industry it now is, there are built no mechanisms for a quality audit, for correction of errors, for curbing the actions of owners who veer away from public service, for pre-empting the

Indian Press Must Introspect

by Chanchal Sarkar

Star Guest Columnist

Eastern Europe is already in full flood in Western Europe, the United States, Australia, Japan, Mexico and Brazil — the buying, merging, moving as close as possible to a monopoly. The levels of ownership concentration and the share in circulations are already awesome. Take Italy. After dithering for about 15 years an anti-trust law was passed in 1990 meant almost exclusively to check Silvio Berlusconi.

UNCED: Prepcom-IV Will Focus on Agreed Priorities within Agenda 21

by Chakravarthi Raghavan

The principal focus of work at the fourth session of the Preparatory Committee for the June UNCED summit will be on discussing and negotiating on agreed priorities within Agenda 21, UNCED Deputy Secretary-General Nitin Desai said recently.

Internal process for environment and sustainable development, where overall programmes would be tied together on the basis of mutually agreed priorities and objectives, the UNCED official responsible for the preparation of the documents said. The entire structure of Agenda 21 was development oriented, programmes to be implemented by development administrations rather than environmental ones.

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Meanwhile, the multiple editions are nothing other than a monopoly thrust. They have not been recognised as such but the effect will become plain — and then it will be too late to do anything, as so often is the case in India.

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A newspaper, whether owned by a business house or a family, does not automatically become 'responsible'. Where are the 'National Directors'? Where are the ombudsmen? What, after his appointment as ombudsman of the Time of India group has Mr Justice Bhagwati been doing? Does not the public have a right to know? Is not the Press' emphasis always on the

right to do rather than on the right thing to do?

With Indian Press laws so stagnant (oh! that Official Secrets Act of 1923) where are the test cases to constantly shove the frontiers to break into new territories of freedom? Has the Press funded any Centre for Investigative Journalism? Has it even got an archive or museum? How much do Indian journalists control the information they produce? Are the Journalism Departments of much use as monitors and evaluators? Do freelancers have any protection? With the status and powers of editors (not owner-editors) crumbling day by day, not only in the big cities but in the small towns even more, where is the unofficial Press Commission set up by the Indian Press to take stock during the haul towards the year 2000?

By arrangement with the Hindustan Times, New Delhi.

DEMANDS AND RESPONSES

Sir, This is to express my feelings with regards to the demands of increased remuneration by employees of various public sector organizations. Amongst several objectives of setting up these sector corporations the important ones were to generate employment, create facilities otherwise not available, and to benefit the society in general.

Over the years some of these corporations have lost their original objectives and

DEMANDS AND RESPONSES

utility to the society. It is very unfortunate and pathetic to mention that some even have become burden on the nation as a whole. The national exchequer has invested substantial sum for these corporations. Now to keep these afloat the meagre resources of this poor country has to be arranged for funds every year. In newspaper columns we read from time to time that crores of Taka are lost year in and year out by some of these. Commonmen on the street are footing the bill.

Some rational thinking

DEMANDS AND RESPONSES

should be introduced at this stage. It should be asked if my money is spent to pay bonus for no good done by Tom, Dick and Harry.

A Reader

DEMANDS AND RESPONSES

I propose that if fund is not available from an unit's own fund to meet all the demands, and the same is to be spent either by borrowing or from government exchequer, a referendum should be held to obtain consent for the same.

A Reader

DEMANDS AND RESPONSES

It is a matter of great shame and regret that world bodies were absolutely silent on the loss of this brave soldier of Islam. Where are those world organizations such as the United Nation, Human Rights who always talk about anti-terrorism? Is there any doubt about terrorist activities of Israel all around the world? Martyrdom of brother Abbas Musavi and his innocent family is one of the few examples and evidences which no one can deny or ignore.

Abbas Musavi and the cause

Sir, With great sadness we came to know that our dear brother Abbas Musavi, the chief and the Secretary General of Hezbollah, who spent all his life for the prosperity of Islam, embraced mar-

DEMANDS AND RESPONSES

tyrdom at the cruel hands of occupation forces (Israel) in south Lebanon.

Abbas Musavi and the cause

A question arises for me and I think for all conscious people that why UN should allow or continue the membership of such terrorist body in the organisation any more. Indeed and in fact no one can

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

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BRTC buses for Mirpur

Sir, We the residents of Mirpur are dependent on the BRTC buses as far as we move on the roads. It is conspicuously noticeable that these buses are usually overloaded. Not only that people hang on the door of the jam-packed buses, but they also get on the roof, which is strictly prohibited in accordance with traffic rules. The number of passengers far exceeds the accommodating capacity of the bus.

DEMANDS AND RESPONSES

I, therefore, hope that the concerned authority should adopt necessary measures to increase the number of buses and thus save the common people from regular troubles.

DEMANDS AND RESPONSES

Thus martyrdom of this great soldier will in fact motivate his followers in the sense, more actively and vigorously, and shall lead to an awakening in the Muslim world.

DEMANDS AND RESPONSES

Syed Rahim Ashnakhah, An Iranian student, BUET, Dhaka.