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

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 of 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 complain 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 held 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 Cypras, was an emphatic "yes". Ironically Egypt, which was one of the co-founders of NAM along with India and Yugoslavia, disfered. 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 coun-

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-toodistant 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 affiltated bodies focused sharply on development issues.

FOCUS ON PAKISTAN

APC Campaign Against IJI Not Likely to Work

M J Zahedi writes from Karachi

HE first half of the month was dominated by the agitation in and outside Kashmir, the activities of the Opposition, particularly the All Parties Conference

The APC is in the process of launching a campaign against the government of Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif either to dislodge it or to make it national. But neither possibility seems likely. The IJI govern ment is well-entrenched. It has a comfortable majority in the parliament unless, of course, the MQM decides to withdraw support.

Of late the MQM has developed grievances against the Centre on two counts. One, the transfer of Mr Aftab Nabi. DIG Sindh, who is the brother of Mr Islam Nabi. Federal Minister of Production as an MQM nominee. Secondly, because over 6000 employees have been retrenched from the Pakistan Steel Mills, Karachi, A new MD. a militaryman who has been running the Pakistan Ordnance Factories, Wah. has done the pruning because he felt the organisation did not need all these employees. They had all been recruited while there was a countrywide ban on new employments in government departments. Unfortunately (for the govern menth they were all MQM

The issue has strained relations between the Centre and the MQM and the latter's

EW DELHI : Quotes are

sometimes good launc-

hing 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 other, hugely

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 to

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

to me, leads an unexamined

life. Into the flourishing indus-

try 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

ENEVA : Desai said the

J above when answering questions at a press

briefing on the Agenda 21

documents and reports for

Prepcom-IV. due to take place

in New York 2 March to 3

the UNCED secretariat said

the secretariat had done a pro-

fessional job of preparing pro-

posals and costing them in

terms of the various pro-

gramme areas identified in the

mentation of the programmes

would need an annual \$125

billion of concessional assis-

tance and four to five times

that amount of expenditure

and investments by the Third

dination in a process which

would involve the recipients in

a far more direct way than the

existing systems where it is

largely donor-based, Desai

de Janetro will not end on 12

June with some cheques being

signed for the \$125 billion of

external assistance or for cut

and dry agreements or a con-

tract, but rather would see the

start and launching of a new

The UNCED summit at Rio

Agenda 21 has some 115

World countries themselves.

Based on these, the imple-

Prepcom under Agenda 21.

The second top official of

questions at a press

The Indian Press, it seems

public service.

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

The Jam himself is not physically fit these days so much so that he had to be absent from his daughter's wedding festivities which took place recently at his ancestral village, Jam Nawaz Alt Goth, in the interior of Sindh. The cer emony was attended by over 30,000 people including the President, the Prime Minister. Governors, ministers, politicians, diplomats and everybody who is somebody in the country. But the list published in the newspapers did not contain the name of a single opposition politician, including even the two Bhutto ladies. Jam Sadiq Ali had gone there

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.

As readers will already have known about these developments by the time this write up is published. I have decided to devote it to some events and happenings which are not politically important and may not have been reported in the Bangladesh Press, but never theless might be of interest to the 'Star'-gazers.

Weather

First, the weather. Karachi was been very cold the last two weeks. Winter came late but seems to be persisting. There has practically been no rains in Karachi. Except brief showers on a couple of days. However, Lahore had heavy rains despite which the cultural centre of Pakistan celebrated the basant festival in the traditional manner. Millions of rupees were spent on kite-flying (the real and not the political kind). which is what the festival is all about. But politics could just not be kept apart. The main event was organised at Lahore's Pearl Continental Hotel and was attended by foreign diplomats, politicians (of the right hue) and senior government officials. The Opposition politices went to one organised within the

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 policemen will be a polite policeman is one of the arguments presented in favour of the proposal. Rather fanciful,

That drug prices in Pakistan have risen rather sharply during the last few days may not be a big news in these days of inflation. The report in Dawn cited short supply by the Pharmaceutical companies and smuggling as the main reasons for the increase. A plain. matter-of-fact story till you read it in conjunction with another item published in a Rawalpindi newspaper. The Muslim It said that "the most lavishly organised seminars, frequently being organised by the pharmaceutical companies, mostly

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" fin Puniabl. 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.

Indian Press Must Introspect

baleful dangers of monopoly or for accountability to the public.

Developments elsewhere cast shadows of events likely to arrive here. The Press of Eastern Europe is in tatters and turmoil, and also backward in electronic technology. Hopefully the spirit that moved them to burst their shackles will also help the East Europeans to rebuild democratic media. But for the moment they are favoured with the acute attentions of, among others, Hachette, Berlusconi, Bertelsmann, Time Life, Gannett, Springer, Murdoch and (probably no longer) Maxwell. Bertelsmann Book Clubs, for instance, have driven to bankruptcy almost the entire publishing and bookselling of what was East Germany and tens of thousands of books have had to be given away or

What is being attempted in

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.

In India we hear wails about "the invasion from the skies" but the technology of print invasion, via the skies, was perfected quite some time ago. There is talk of the Financial Times of London starting up. Printing proposals for wellknown international

newsweeklies and newspapers are already in the ring. Without ownership interests even printing and circulation are points of entry. Should there be foreign ownership? Britain has already weathered newspaper owners from America and Canada. Japan has bought into the media of the United States. Unofficially there can not but have been proposals for

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.

Meanwhile, the multiple

The Press Council is a ponderous, pallid and powerless body Begun in imitation of the

British (except that it started statutory, as the Indian Press for 14 long years showed no signs of starting one) it has not gone through even the reforms an anti-freedom Thatcherite Government thrust on the Press Complaints Council as it is now called What forward-looking changes have there been in the last ten years in the Indian Newspaper Society, the journalists' unions or the Press Institute of India?

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 has 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 (eh! that Official Secreta 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.

ties - between the 'global is-

sues that the donors had

identified for the GEF and

which reflected the environ-

ment priorities and preoccu-

pations of the North and

development and poverty era-

dication priorities of the South

- could be achieved in the five

weeks of Prepcom-IV or

whether it would all lead to

The UNCED official said the

confrontation at Rio.

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 discusing 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.

programme areas, with the The entire structure of greater part focussing on land. Agenda 21 was development water and human settlements. oriented, programmes to be In effect the programme implemented by development calls for a new global partneradministrations rather than ship and international develenvironmental ones. opment cooperation and coor-

It was a set of programmes for revitalisation of growth and development and for tackling the major issues of the international economy and, for the greater part, consisted of a reiteration of proposals already under discussion in a variety of forums : commodities, debt, trade, etc.

It also tried to focus on raising living standards and attacking poverty, the major focal point of Agenda 21. Towards this end, the

a major commitment and UNbased global programme whose implementation should be monitored by the UN Secretary-General.

Agenda 21 proposals called for

The attack on poverty, Desai said, would involve an annual \$30 billion focussing on development work in the three areas of land, water and human settlements. The programmes were both development and for resource conservation, with the two combined to produce a sustainable livelihood programme.

On the 'global issues' in the Agenda 21 programme, which the secretariat paper has identified as those covered by the World Bank-run Global Environment Facility (GEF). but where the priorities have been set by the donors to the GEF (as the NGOs were told last December at a GEF consultation). Desai explained that as the UNCED document itself

spelt out it was not easy to separate global and national programmes.

While this had been repeatedly underlined in each of the programme areas, nevertheless the secretariat in its costing exercise had been asked to do a costing for the global programmes. In taking the sectors identified in the GEF for this purpose, the secretariat had steered clear of the costs of the commitments under the two conventions being negotiated : climate change and biodiversity.

The figure for concessional external assistance for the Agenda 21 programmes, Desai said, was consistent with the targets for official development assistance set in the UN (0.7% of GNP) and perhaps a little higher.

But they were not intended to be commitments but rather in the nature of indicative figures on the costs of transition to sustainability on the planet.

The UNCED official was asked how he believed the \$125 billion aid figure would materialise which, though nearer the UN's 0.7% target, was still way above what the OECD DAC countries were now spending, namely 0.35%. Desait said the secretariat had been asked to do a professional job of costing programmes which had been outlined and this had been done. If the amounts needed were not available. then priorities would have to be set.

But these priorities would have to reflect the views of all countries, and the principal focus of Prepcom-IV would be to set these priorities. Desait added.

We were given a set of programmes and priorities and we have done a costing. Now it is for the governments to sit down and see how all these can be realised or achieved." Desai was then asked

whether this setting of priori-

greater part of the Agenda 21 programmes related to land. water and human settlements. all issues of concern to the South. The challenge was to get across the view that theses are global problems and that if they wanted a sustainable world in the next century. these problems would have to be resolved as much as those of ozone depletion, climate change or biodiversity.

The solution we have to look for is not a final definitive contract — the time available will not be enough for that but rather agree on a process towards and underlying system of mutual obligations where finances and real programmes are tied together on the basis of agreed priorities.'

- Third World Network Features

Chakravarthi Raghavan is Chief Editor of SUNS (South-North Development Monitor), a daily bulletin, and the Geneva representative of the Third World Network.

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.

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

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 affoat the meagre resources of this poor country has to arrange 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

Some rational thinking

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.

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 refer endum should be held to ob tain consent for the same.

A Reader

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 Hezbullah. who spent all his life for the prosperity of Islam, embraced mar-

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

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.

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 deny that Israel continues with her terrorist-activities in shelter of USA who so far applied her Veto power to withdraw or cancel all resolutions adopted at UN against Israel.

Israel and all enemies of Islam should know that when blood of an innocent leader is spilled on earth, it gives inspiration to all his followers and they become more stronger on the principle or faith they are fighting for, and this has been evident in history too.

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

Syed Rahim Ashnakhah An Iranian student BUET, Dhaka

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.

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.

S Rahman Mirpur, Dhaka.