Dhaka, Sunday, May 17, 1992

## A New Role for NAM

The question crops up again: Is the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) still relevant? We have no hesitation in answering the question in the affirmative. What is important is to define its role in a changing world and discuss a new agenda for the movement on the basis of its new priorities.

On all these issues, President Suharto of Indonesia put forward several sound ideas at the opening of the two-day ministerial meeting of NAM's Co-ordinating Bureau on Thursday at his country's island resort of Bali. What the President said would - indeed, should - influence the agenda for the summit of the movement, scheduled to be held in Jakarta in September. Following the meeting of heads of some 103 governments, Indonesia will take over the chairmanship of NAM — the second Asian country, after India, to do so since the movement was born some four decades ago — for a full term. This challenging responsibility will provide a welcome boost to Indonesia's growing importance in world affairs.

During his address at the Bali meeting, the Indonesian leader reiterated what appears to be something of a consensus that NAM should now pay increased attention to producing a socio-ecónomic agenda - not a paper resolution but one that can be taken up and discussed with the industrialised West and Japan and implemented. For this agenda. NAM will return to a number of unresolved issues of the past, such as a meaningful relief for debt-ridden developing countries, the removal of protective quotas in the developed countries hindering exports from NAM countries and an increase in the volume of Official Development Assistance (ODA) of countries in the industrialised West, many of which are yet to reach the agreed proportion of a mere one per cent of their Gross National Product (GNP). Now, new issues will be added to the agenda. The question of the industrialised countries, which are largely responsible for creating the greenhouse effect, contributing to a new fund for the protection of global environment may well top the list. Again, it should be the industrialised West to set an example for diverting the saving from defence cuts to development, a process in which NAM countries- some of whom do spend excessive funds on the purchase of arms- must indeed take part.

The sad thing about NAM is that it could never get the Western countries and Japan sit down with the movement's leading members for a substantive discussion on any of these issues. Indonesia may well be able to turn this failure into a thing of the past. Perhaps, President Suharto should promote a political agenda for the movement as a basis for its socio-economic programme. During his address at Bali, he made a case for strengthening the United Nations and for making the world body "more democratic." Herein lies a subtle hint that in the unipolar world in which the United States has become the over-dominant power, a more independent United Nations, more self-reliant than it appeared in recent past, could serve as a balancing factor, one that could also exercise a restraining influence on Washington.

While efforts are made to give the United Nations a new role. Washington should look upon NAM as a positive force. There is little doubt that many of the new emerging republics of the former Soviet Union will join the movement, together with countries in eastern Europe. Under the leadership of Indonesia, NAM can indeed develop a political clout which, in turn, can help the movement to press hard for a serious international dialogue on the socio-economic agenda that, in the past, went by default. This reemergence of NAM on the world stage, one that the West and Japan must deal with, should be part of the changing realities in the post-cold war world.

## Revamping telecom

The World Telecommunication Day is being observed throughout the world today. With only 0.18 numbers of telephone per 100 people, Bangladesh, a member of the 168 member International Telecommunication Union (ITU), is not happily poised to make the most of the day. Nevertheless, the country's commitment to the day ought not to suffer from any ambivalence. Although somewhat stereotyped, the theme of the day is focused with enough fervour but only in a limited circle. The fact that we have half as many and only one third as many telephone sets per 100 people compared to India's and Pakistan's respectively makes the country's telecommunication system a strong candidate for structural reorganisation.

How this will be done is a question that concerns the government policy. But the need for devolution of the super-structure - perhaps through some privatisation in selected areas now proves quite overriding. Inefficient management, overbilling, cross connections etc have now become a perennial problem in the system. The cumulative impacts of them, year after year, can wreak havoc with not just the flow of information in the country but its economy as well leading to its stunted development. While the world is moving fast with an increasing flow of information about every conceivable subject, we in Bangladesh are yet to fully realise the potential of telecommunications.

Despite Telecommunications Minister M Keramat Ali's assertion that return on investment in telecom is high, the service is nowhere near to meeting the need of the day. A modernised system with flawless service is yet to be the order of the day. This points to the need of a government to be bold enough to wield the axe. Capital intensive as the system is, the telephone in particular has nowhere balked at the costs. Its service to the community has ever remained unmatched in the person-to-person exchange of information.

In an interview with Dhaka Courier, the telecommunications minister has envisioned a bright future for the sector. In support of his vision, he has divulged quite a number of steps now being contemplated for improving the telecommunication- in terms of both quantity and quality. If some of the plans he referred to materialise, there is every possibility of the system getting a lift. But past experiences here have not been very encouraging. Most promises often come to nought simply because the plans are often frustrated by inadequate preparation for the real task of implementation. On this occasion, let us be candid enough to observe the day through committing ourselves to the plan we have worked out.

## Tolerance and Constructive Engagement Lead to Progress

URING Ramadan last year. I happened to be in a restaurant at Kuala Lampur just be for the lftar time waiting for the end of the fast. I noticed a Chinese who was not Muslim entering the restaurant. He was imme diately seated and served with the set Iftar menu. Without waiting — being unaware of the approaching end of the fast, he took a sip from his cold drink and was about to put a spoonful of food in his mouth when he suddenly realised that everyone else was waiting with food in front of them. He was embarrassed, quickly left the

spoon and sat stiff. The remarkable thing was that nobody bothered to notice the small incident except the young Malaya lady sitting at the next table. She looked at him, smiled and said," It is all right; please go ahead with your dinner; we only must wait for our Iftar," All the embarrassment of the non-Muslim Chinese vanished immediately.

This remarkable tolerance at the national level is what has sustained the multi-racial society of Malaysia composed of Malayas who are all Muslims, the ethnic Chinese who are Buddhists and mostly Hindu Indian Tamils. Not only their language, religion and culture are entirely different, their physical features are also wide apart so much so that identification is possible without any difficulty. Moreover, professionally also the differences

NE despairing Serbian seemed to sum it all up.

"Now it will be imp-os-

sible to put Yugoslavia together

again," he said. "Now everyone

hates each other - and yet

eventually they must live to-

He spoke as fighting in this

be seiged republic became

more intense by the day, as

Yugoslavia's Serbs, Croats and

Muslims punished each other

for the territory they each

The killing in Sarajevo and

across Bosnia began to escalate

on April 6, when Europe and

the United States recognised

Bosnia's independence. It

came only a month after the

decisive referendum on inde-

pendence that was boycotted

by the republic's 1.4 million

paramilitary forces in the hills

overlooking Bosnia's capital

Sarajevo targeted Muslim areas

with mortar and sniper fire

and edged closer toward the

stroyed. Shelling has gutted

the historic Ottoman market

area, and even the museum

dedicated to 1984 Sarajevo

Winter Olympics has been set

many of them from villages

under fire - flee the areas of

fighting, cramming into the

cities or crossing into other

And every day, the refugees

Much of the old city is de-

Every day after that, Serbian

gether again."

claim is theirs.

city centre.

republics.

are utterly striking. Such a divergent racial conglomeration was due to the British colonial policy of divide and rule. The rulers imported the Tamtis to work in the rubber and palm oil plantations; while the Chinese where

brought in to work in the tin

mines. The indigenous Malayas

remained the farmers and fishermen. After the Britishers left, the colony was not partitioned along racial or religious lines so unlike of what happened in

South Asia. There was tolerance on the part of the indigenous Malayas and there was no hesitation on their part to recognise the rights of the Chinese and the Indians who is their turn adopted the path of constructive engagement by recognizing the Malayas as Bumiputra (sounds almost Bengali) or 'son of the soil' in order to give them economic advantages so that they can come out of their relatively more downtrodden and economically depressed condi-

Mutual tolerance and constructive engagement have been for the last three decades since their independence the cornerstone of Malaysian policy of economic and social development. And, look what has happened as a result: the economy enjoyed doubled digit growth rates for the last so many years and no poised to become a developed country by

the turn of the century. They have made it to the finishing line while we languished in the termented pool of mutual animosities, hatred and retribution in the conflict-prone, strife-ridden subcontinent.

### Back to Square One

A friend of mine, the type of intellectual we have in plenty in the subcontinent, once gave me the most fatalistic (and perhaps true, I do not know)

characteristic of all these golden ages had been mutual tolerance and constructive engagement. The subcontinent is too big for only one homogeneous population group. There are bound to be varieties of races, language, culture and creed. The land itself is so diverse - from the highest mountain to the lowest delta or from the meanest deserts to the greenest valleys. Golden

## Age implied that among the WINDOW ON ASIA

Shahed Latif

explanation of our perpetual state of decay. It may be termed as the "Back to Square One" theory. It runs as follows If we look at history, we find that 25 centuries back Buddhism the religion of tol erance and peace reigned supreme when all mutual conflicts and animosities had vanished. The whole of south Asia was a land of harmony Prosperity automatically followed. But it was an aberration from the historically determined path, so back to square one and the perpetual state of

permanent decay. All throughout recorded history, there had been periods known as the golden age from the Maurya period of ancient times down to the later half of British Raj. The chief

various peoples living in variettes of landscape there were harmony, tolerance and peace so that constructive engagements in terms of agricultural production, textile waving etc. On the one hand and trade on the other were promoted Result: there was prosperity and so the golden age. But the above mentioned theory would propound that aberrations like the golden age must be shortlived; hence back to square one and the perpetual state of

Coming to the more recent times, the later half of the British period could be reckoned as the golden age, since compared to rest of the developing world, the subcontinent was decidedly more advanced in the context of that time.

However, times have dramatically changed. During the last four and a half decades we are again back to square one and today South Asia is the black hole of backwardness and destitution in Asia.

### Our Destiny in Our Hands

At the same time we have advanced too far in the world. Our destiny should be in our hands. The process of historical determinism can be stopped with the combined force of over a billion people of the subcontinent provided we are convinced of one single golden rule : tolerance and constructive engagement among all the peoples of the subcontinent. If it could happen in Malaysia, why not in South Asia where over two thousand years of continuous history constitute a strong bond and the dissimilarities among the peoples are also not that glaring. Only politics and narrow vested interest have played havoc with our future.

Hindus, Muslims and the Chinese are living together in Peninsular Malaysia for the last one hundred years. The differences between them are much more pronounced than that among Hindus and Muslims of the subcontinent. Yet the slaughter of a pig so favourite with the Chinese never led to a riot in that country while such incidents with the holy cow are so rampant in the subcontinent. The fundamental difference between the two situa-

tions seem to be utter lack of mutual tolerance and no concept of constructive engagement. Is it due to the failure of leadership or an inherent characteristic of the peoples? How religion alone can make such a big difference between two families, living side by side for centuries?

To any rational human being, the whole thing is utterly ridiculous - indeed so stupid. Time is running out and there fore let the leaders of the subcontinent during the next SARC summit take the vow of tolerance and constructive engagement as the starting point of the new 21st century era of development so that we could be drawn into the mainstream of global development in general and the Pacific century in particular. Our leaders must realise where the rest of the world is going and why must we proceed only in the reverse

With the end of the cold war after the overwhelming victory of democracy over totalitarianism, of market system over command economy, dramatic changes have engulfed the whole world. The golden period of constructive cooperation has taken over the reigns in international relations with the death of the age of meaningless confrontation. In South Asia, let us forget the whimpers of the past animosities and start with a bang for the cooperative future.

# Where Everyone Hates Each Other and a City Dies

decay.

Petar Hadji-Ristic writes from Sarajevo, Bosnia-Hercegovina

The agony of Yugoslavia was compounded when Europe and the US recognised the independence of Bosnia following a referendum on independence that was boycotted by 1.4 million Serbs. Paramilitary Serbs targeted Sarajevo's Muslim areas and the siege of the capital was on. Already much of the old city is destroyed and the historic Ottoman market gutted.

#### Ethnic division in the former Yugoslavia Hungary Romania 54.4% Serbs OVENIA 18.8% Hungarien Population:2 million Population: \$3 million 2.2% Serbs HERCEGOVINA 66.4% Serbs 14% Albanian AIT A OH! .6% Croat 2.3% Muslim Population:4.5 million 75% Crosts 11.5% Serbe Population:2 million &7% Macedonien OSMIA HERZEGOVI Adriatic See 19.8% Albenian Population:4 million 32.2% Serbs 2.3% Serbs 39.9% Muslims 18.4% Crosts MACEDONIA **68% Montenegrins** 13.4% Muslims 2016 H Greece 6.5% Albanians

by the citizens of Sarajevo, who protested in front of the city's parliament building.

"When the situation is like this we must go out and do something," said Nadida Kasedzic, a young court worker who had walked through the near-deserted city to rally with

her boyfriend. A last collective call for "I don't want to sit at home the snipers were. The peace was held in early April

But a murderous volley of sniper gunfire cut down a random handful of the demonstrators. Those moving slowly toward the Serbian-manned barricades spanning the river were suddenly stopped dead in their tracks.

No one could be sure who

demonstrators were of mixed background, as varied as the city itself. Forty per cent of Bosnia's population was Muslim, 32 per cent Serb and 18 per cent Croat.

"We have lived together here for so long, we are all mixed," said Kaledzic.

The city police, dressed in protective flak jackets, seemed in no hurry to investigate the killing. But just across the river, bearded paramilitary soldiers cold be seen with their automatic weapons levelled at the crowd. Usually, only Serbs sport such distinctively long, bushy beards.

The occasional boom from the Holiday Inn opposite Parliament meant some of the shooting was also coming from there. It was thought to come from those bodyguards of Radovan Karadzic, head of the Serbian Democratic Party, who had not fled the hotel with their leader hours before.

"It is best to transfer Bosnia into three states," Karadzic had said. "Bosnia cannot be independent until it is transformed into a confederation."

Next day thousands of unarmed miners where bussed

into Sarajevo, where they stormed the Holiday Inn. wrecking the rooms Karadzic had used and trussing up sev-

Today, the miners' buses would be unlikely to reach the city. The roads approaching Sarajevo are guarded by the Yugoslav federal army, which also protects the airport as the one safe area of the city.

eral of his men.

When Britain's former foreign secretary, Lord Carrington, visited Sarajevo on April 23 in an unsuccessful attempt to negotiate peace, his advisers would not let him leave the airport. Plans to visit the downtown hotel that housed the United Nations peacekeeping troops and international media were shelved because of fears for his salety.

Outside the capital, roads are deserted. Villages often appear abandoned. A massive movement of population seems to have already taken place.

Bosnia itself is now dividing into ethnically pure areas. Some say the Serbs now control 70 per cent of the former Yugoslavian republic they are now calling "the Serbian

Republic of Bosnia.

Most of those who have fled their homes will probably not return. The fighting and suffering everyone has endured has made hatred between the nationalities too great.

"The army will not let Bosnia go," explained one Serb. "It has nowhere to go." Some 100,000 soldiers are

encamped in Bosnia, many of them withdrawn from the breakaway republics of Slovenia, Croatia and Macedonia. Sixty per cent of Yugoslavia's arms industry is also based in Bosnia.

Across the eastern border in Serbia, people watch apathetically as the fighting among their neighbours escalates. Their state-controlled press - newspapers, radio and television - churns out nonstop propaganda supporting the Serbian cause.

After Bosnia, the army is expected to move to Kosovo, the region to the south where two million Albanians may be ready to continue the revolt. Hyperinflation and economic collapse is inevitable.

People are critical of the way the outside powers especially the Europeans failed to appreciate the nature of Yugoslavia's regime, and allowed the country's situation

to deteriorate into civil war. - GEMINI NEWS

PETAR HADJI-RISTIC represented several major Western newspapers when he was based in Belgrade.

# Women Perennial Losers in 'Poverty Olympics'

AKE the upcoming Summer Olympics in Barcelona as an analogy. Imagine a race - not a 100 metre dash, but the 15,000 metres or, even more appropriately the marathon. The athletes, hard muscled and skilled from years of rigorous experience and training, are grouped at the starting line. The starting gun goes off, the

But it is immediately clear that something is radically wrong, that the race is blatantly unequal. A small number of runners immediately surge ahead, quickly out distancing the others. Behind them run a large group of men, but their movements seem sluggish.

contestants surge forward.

Strange, until one realises that their track shoes are weighted with lead, making each stride and agony of effort. And behind them an even larger group, all women, who in addition to having shoes of

lead are carrying a child on their back.

It takes no particular insight to predict the outcome of the race: a handful of "winners" and the vast majority a very poor second, with the women coming in last.

Translation — the arena is the rural areas of the developing world. The race is the most fundamental of all, that for survival. A few, the privileged by

birth or fortune, lead lives of

gle unsuccessfully to cross the

comfort. The others, forced to wear the leaden shoes of poverty, lag far behind. Making up the rear are women - the 565 million who today, despite their long hours in the home and fields, strug-

poverty line. It was to turn the international spotlight on this "race" that is being run daily throughout the developing world that the International

Idriss Jazairy writes from Rome

Women now grow at least half of the food rural families eat. But their productive potential is far too often hampered, simply because they are not men

Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) organised the recent Summit on the economic advancement of rural women in Geneva.

Here 65 wives of heads of state and government gathered. Her Majesty Queen Fabiola of Belgium, President Rene Felber of Switzerland, together with the new Secretary-General of the UN, Boutros Boutros-Ghali and representatives from other UN and multilateral development agencies, to voice their concern over the growing numbers of impoverished rural women and to declare their commitment to concerted, concrete action that will make

the "race" more equal.

This is not a matter of "good sportsmanship" but of sound economic and social sense. For it is not an exaggeration to say that rural women are the key to poverty alleviation and rural development. Their productive role has always been vital, though generally unrecognised, a role that in the years to come will be even more important as increasing numbers of men leave the countryside to find work elsewhere.

Women now grow atleast half of the food rural families eat - as much as 70 per cent in Africa — and many earn crucial income by selling produce or engaging in small offfarm enterprises.

But their productive potential is far too often hampered, not only by their arduous domestic duties but also simply because they are not men.

In many regions, women cannot own land or other productive resources. They are barred, by law or practice, from getting credit. They are ignored by extension services and bypassed by training pro-

The solution is not charity or welfare but the provision of those basic resources and support needed to lighten their burdens and increase their productivity. Here credit is a fundamental factor, for a loan is often the only way a poor women can afford to buy seeds, small livestock, crop processing equipment or materials to start up a cottage industry.

In project after project, IFAD has found that a loan of as

difference, for women tend to invest wisely and use their returns to improve family wellbeing. And experience has shown that even the poorest of women are excellent credit risks, 97 per cent of them repaying their loans on time - a far better record than men and

little as US \$40 can make a big

ter off farmers. This summer, hundreds of millions of people will be watching the colourful Olympics. This summer, too, at least one billion rural people almost 60 per cent of them women - will still be facing drab chronic poverty.

substantially above that of bet-

The world will cheer the athletes in Barcelona. What will the world do for the others? - Depthnews Asia

Idriss Jazatry is the president of the International Fund for Agricultural Development, headquartered in Rome, Italy

## Partisan

Sir, In Chicago in the 1930's, organised crime formed rival gangs that fought bloody and merciless private wars. It was not uncommon for example, for one gang to raid another's party with machineguns, and not stay to count the bodies. At stake was total supremacy, and the alternative was often annihilation. In this war, individual politicians and sometimes whole parts of the police force were bought. But the gangs were never able to achieve legitimacy, and were ultimately curtailed.

Browsing through local newspapers last week forced me to wonder how gangsters and racketeers in our country carry licences to operate in the form of their party mani-

festos. Look at what happened in Chittagong. Our politicians are increasingly resembling king-pins, and even government has degenerated into the battle of the "ins" trying to eliminate the "outs". They're not even acting coy about it! What can you say when of two questionable operations, one (opposition) gets taken to the cleaners while another (government party) is converted into a scheduled operator? Its partisan.

Finally, let is be clear that this is not a partisan letter. Its because I see the above that I have no affiliation; my stomach is too sensitive.

RJ Tanvir Dhanmondi, Dhaka

## Of trees and wood

Sir, I fully endorse Ms Munira Khan's recent letter expressing the urgent need for Bangladesh to address the environmental problems. Even in the face of alarming statistics one would like to believe that it is not already too late for action; that there is some hope for the future generations of the world whose share of the natural resources are being overharvested thoughtlessly across the world.

Leaving workshops and seminars to people who thrive on them, there is a great deal each one of us can do to improve the forest cover of this country, individually and by supporting action groups working in this field. For a start, we could invest a little

money and effort to plant trees on the streets we live on, instead of simply beautifying our own gardens. That maybe perceived as the job of Rajuk, or some such authority in other towns and cities, but in fact is as much our responsibility as anyone else's. Besides why not do our bit?

The Roads and Highways authorities' mindless practice of decimating tons of firewood every year to repair the city roads, when they could just as easily use gas cylinders or even temporary gas connections (wherever and whenever possible) does not bear thinking.

How is it possible that while they spend crores of Taka on planting trees on the roadsides etc, they fail to notice the

connection between what they practice and what they preach? It is a criminal waste of an invaluable resource.

The use of firewood in brickfields has been banned since '89, yet it is being used blatantly in the brickfields which have proliferated all over the country. Studies show that while imported coal remains unsold in the coal depots, brickfields continue to consume wood - most often stolen from forest reserves in the first place and sold at ridiculously low prices - with total disregard to the law pertaining to it. Dare we ask what the law enforcing authorities are doing about it?

S R Ghuznavi Baridhara, Dhaka

#### Good men Sir, Man who sincerely

thinks and selflessly works for the welfare of his people and nation generally experiences more pain and sorrows. Often he has to shade tears for the trrational attitudes of others. He feels for the betterment of others ignoring his own good. He does all the best he can for others. Thank God, societies and countries still have this sort of men who are working silently. Perhaps our dear earth will see its least rites when good souls will compictely vanish from among us. Let us try to be good men and think for the welfare of others as well as of the country.

M Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor, BAI, Dhaka