

Non-Alignment: Is there a Future?

Indeed the Non-Aligned Movement is conspicuous by its absence from all the major flash points in the world. In the Middle East it is the United States which has taken the initiative in the peace process; in Cambodia and Afghanistan it is the permanent members of the UN Security Council who are orchestrating the developments; in Yugoslavia it is the EEC which is seeking a role as the peacemaker.

The Mission to Pakistan

It is perfectly understandable, indeed desirable, that the trip to Pakistan of Prime Minister Begum Khaleda Zia, starting today, should aim at strengthening the ties between Islamabad and Dhaka in fields ranging from trade and commerce to our shared concern and commitments in the area of international and regional affairs. On most of these issues, Begum Zia and her host Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif should be able to reach solid agreements, against the background of their common obligations to the programmes and ideals of the South Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC). The alliance that is crying out for a new lease of life. It is our hope that instead of indulging in expressions of pious hopes for the future of SAARC, the two leaders and their aides will look at a plan of concrete actions in preparation of the SAARC Summit that is scheduled to be held in Dhaka later this year.

However, without underestimating the importance of these regional or even the international issues which will come up for discussion during the much-too-short visit of Begum Zia to Pakistan, we believe that focus of the talks should—and indeed must—be on the outstanding bilateral problems which cast a shadow over our relationship. Here, we must face the unpleasant fact that the longer the governments of the two countries sit on these unresolved problems, the harder it will be for the administrations in Dhaka and Islamabad to maintain their credibility in their own relationship as well as with people who are adversely affected by one of these outstanding issues.

The particular issue concerns the repatriation of the stranded Pakistanis in Bangladesh. Numbering 2.38 lakh, according to the latest count, these unfortunate victims of a historical change have been counting days, months, years and, indeed, over two decades to return to what they rightly regard as their home, Pakistan. In human terms, the misfortune of these stranded Pakistanis has been often compared to the tragedy of stateless Palestinians. The comparison has one major flaw in it. Unlike in the case of the Palestinians, a clear-out agreement exists between Islamabad and Dhaka on the repatriation of these stranded Pakistanis. That the short-lived government of Benazir Bhutto tried to get out of it is now no more than a footnote in history. What is most important, the Sharif Government is unequivocal in its commitment, a commitment that goes back to the days when the Pakistan Prime Minister was the head of the provincial administration in Punjab. There is also considerable international support—financial and otherwise—for the repatriation plan. However, one hopes that the support, especially the financial one, gets a new boost and that there is no hesitation on the part of Islamabad to agree to a firm time schedule for the repatriation that Begum Zia should discuss with her counterpart in Pakistan. It is now all a question of putting a plan for the return of these stranded Pakistanis to their homes into action. And the quicker it is done the better.

The same goes for the agreement that already exists on the question of division of assets of liabilities between Islamabad and Dhaka, yet another legacy of 1971. Here, too, a mechanism has been set up for working out the modalities for putting the agreement into effect. Unfortunately, the impression here is that it is only a paper body. It is in the best interest of the two countries that this mechanism is activated to serve the desired purpose. Once the two leaders have tackled these two issues, with positive results, they should find out more about thousands of Bangladeshi women who are either in Pakistani jails as illegal immigrants or victims of traffickers in prostitution. Begum Zia must face up to this challenging agenda, with the awareness that her otherwise pleasant trip to Pakistan, all said and done, is also a formidable mission.

Nujoma's Costly Carrier

Norway has cancelled several million dollar worth special drought aid for Namibia. The incident that prompted the decision is more than just unsavory because the purchase of a special aeroplane for Sam Nujoma, Namibia's president, costing as much as 29 million dollar at a time when the country has been experiencing severe drought for the second year running is seen as a glaring example of mindless expenditure. For a newly independent country with a history of long struggle against foreign occupation, this has to be considered a disgrace.

The fact that leaders who have sacrificed so much, exhibited the best possible human quality in the face of overwhelming odds, allow them, when in power, the luxury of a pampered and even spoiled life is unfortunate and exposes the other side of their great character. In this case, Norway was supposed to give 15 million dollar in aid to Namibia, but when the presidential aircraft cost almost double that amount, Norway's decision to scratch the deal looks most appropriate.

It is understandable that a carrier for a country's president needs to be safe, equipped with several facilities to provide some highly useful services and also comforts. But certainly the requirements vary according to the positions of the nations their heads of state represent. Security apart, no other consideration should go in favour of a most costly carrier. But the heads of the poor nations hardly go for judicious — if not too lavish — expenditures on things for their use. A trend so set at the top acts as a bad precedent and the entire nation looks for comforts and consumer goods they can hardly afford. The consequent corrupt practices and degradation of social and moral values are only too natural.

THE 10th Non-Aligned Summit will be held in Jakarta from the first to the sixth of September. The torch will pass, at the Summit, to President Soeharto of Indonesia. In earlier days this would have been an exciting world event. Today it is doubtful if the media will give it more than a passing glance. Even for those heads of governments who will attend the event it is hardly more than a protocol ritual. No one believes that anything of substance will be achieved at the Summit. Indeed one wonders whether it has any worthwhile purpose any more.

Admittedly, for President Soeharto this will be a crowning event — the glorious culmination — of a brilliant career as President of Indonesia for nearly twenty-five years. His election as the Chairman of the Non-Aligned Movement will no doubt further enhance his international standing. Despite the dominant role played by the military in Indonesian politics as well as allegations of corruption, even his detractors admit that Soeharto has given his country a period of peace and stability which was essential for putting its economy back on the rails after the turbulent period of Soekarno. Naturally, Indonesia will not spare any effort to make the conference a success. Moreover, for Indonesia there is a special significance for the Summit. It was in Indonesia in 1955 at the historic Bandung Conference that the 10 basic principles of non-alignment were formulated. Indonesian commitment, however strong, may not make much difference to the outcome. The crisis faced by the Movement is fundamental and lavish hospitality and the most meticulous care in preparations are not likely to guaranty its success unless it can find a new sense of direction and purpose.

The sad fact is that the end of the Cold War has removed the raison d'être of the Movement. In the absence of power blocks to be aligned with, the

concept does not mean anything. Unless the leaders who will gather in Jakarta are able to articulate and adopt a new philosophy for the movement in terms of the political realities of the time and generate some enthusiasm for it, non-alignment may cease to have any relevance for most countries.

The Non-Aligned Movement has been a force to reckon with since the first Summit held in Belgrade in 1961. The cold war was at its height and charismatic leaders like Tito, Nehru and Nasser gave it a stature that the super-powers could not ignore. It had a role in world affairs which was accepted, somewhat grudgingly perhaps, by the great powers. The spokesman of the movement was listened to with respect. Today, however, all this is changed. Yugoslavia happens to be the current chairman but its disintegration has dealt the Movement an additional blow. But even if the leadership was in more secure hands the crisis could not be avoided. It is inherent in the emerging pattern of international relations. The Movement began to weaken when members began to align themselves or tilt on one side or the other. This trend was most evident at the Havana Summit in 1979. As one of the participants at the Conference I saw how the membership was already getting split between the two power blocks. President Fidel Castro's chairmanship may have sharpened the perception of the split among members along ideological lines. Regional conflicts such as the civil wars in Cambodia, Afghanistan, Mozambique, Angola and central Africa found most members of the Movement on one or the other side of the fence. Paradoxically, NAM is not facing its current

crisis because some members are more "aligned" than "non-aligned" but because in a world without power blocks the concept of "alignment" has become obsolete and irrelevant. In the last few years — particularly after the last Summit in Belgrade — the movement has virtually ceased to exercise any influence on the contemporary global issues. The Gulf War was fought in the heart of the Third World but NAM failed to make any impact on the course of events. Indeed the Non-Aligned Movement is conspicuous by its absence from all the major flash points in the world. In the Middle East it is the United States

the Movement to embark on a dynamic and timely adaptation to the new international realities as well as the articulation and implementation of appropriate strategies and approaches. What are those "appropriate strategies and approaches"? They did not explain. Quite clearly the Ministers have diagnosed the disease when they referred to the "new international realities" but they failed to find a remedy. Their call for "greater unity and solidarity" seems to be rather pointless. Unity and solidarity comes from commitment to a common cause which is not there. The communicate referred to the

little weight.

In some quarters, there is talk of shifting the focus of the Movement from political to the economic arena. Others have suggested that NAM and the Group of 77 should be merged. Superficially there is a case for such a change. After all, the vast majority of the members of the Movement are developing countries and their economic needs should get the highest priority. However, on closer examination, this will be seen to be too simplistic a solution. The weaknesses which have characterized the G-77 will also plague NAM if it shifts its focus away from political issues and embraces the G-77 agenda. Have we forgotten the fiasco of the so-called New International Economic Order? No one even talks about it these days. Let us face the realities of the new international economic relations. Global inter-dependence is today a fact of life. There is a relationship of partnership between many developed and developing countries. The ASEAN, for example, has been able to organize regular consultations with its major trading partners — USA, EEC, Japan and Australia to promote trade, investment and joint ventures and transfer of technology. Mexico has joined the USA in the new free trade arrangement with USA and Canada. In other words, the world is no longer neatly divided between the developed and developing countries as we believed to be the case in the sixties and the seventies. Countries such as Singapore and South Korea are no longer in the same economic league as Nepal or Bangladesh though all these are loosely termed as developing countries. The world economic scene to day is dominated by two parallel and equally powerful trends. These are the growth of re-

gionalism and the globalization of international economic relations. The consolidation of the regional groups are proceeding rather rapidly. The EEC, MAFIA and ASEAN are perhaps the most important examples. There are others in varying stages of growth and consolidation. It is most likely that these trends will get greater momentum in the days ahead. The leaders of NAM have thus a daunting task at Jakarta. The Summit must establish NAM's relevance in a world in which the assumptions of the earlier times are no longer valid.

Bangladesh has been a very active member of the Movement ever since we joined it. However, it must be recognized that pursuing a true non-aligned foreign policy is not easy for a country dependent on foreign aid. Unless we attain the capacity for self-reliance in economic matters we will have to tilt in favour of the country or block which controls our life line. However the current international situation offers an opportunity to Bangladesh to forge a foreign policy which will not be bound by the straight-jacket either of non-alignment or alignment. It should be formulated in the context of the international realities of the day. We should certainly attend the Summit but we must also keep our options open. The basic goal of our foreign policy is to safeguard the sovereignty and territorial integrity and promote the welfare of the people and economic development of the country. If the Non-Aligned Movement serves these objectives, we should, by all means, continue to be active members. If not, we should re-assess our priorities. The Jakarta Summit is therefore an excellent opportunity for us to take a hard look at our foreign policy. A dynamic foreign policy must look to the future and not to the past. If the days of non-alignment are over we must accept it and proceed from there to meet the new challenges of the time.

ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

which has taken the initiative in the peace process; in Cambodia and Afghanistan it is the permanent members of the UN Security Council who are orchestrating the developments; in Yugoslavia it is the EEC which is seeking a role as the peacemaker. The Non-Aligned Movement is not even mentioned as a relevant factor in the resolution of any of these conflicts.

The press communique issued at the Ministerial Meeting of the Coordinating Bureau held in Bali on 14-15 May 1992 confirms the impression that the Movement is indeed at a crossroads. The Ministers "believed that the philosophy of the Movement is as relevant as ever and its underlying tenets have remained unchanged" but they did not explain why they hold such a belief. All the evidences are in the other direction. The Ministers "deemed it essential for

"enhanced opportunities", and "new challenges in the evolving situation". It called for exerting a more active influence on the direction of world developments and on the management of international relations. These are ringing phrases and nice sentiments. Ideally the Movement must play all these roles in order to remain in business. However there is not a single word as to how this can be done. NAM is at a dead-end though the leaders are reluctant to acknowledge it. The Ministers stressed the important role of the UN and "they took the view that it is essential for the Movement to participate more actively in these endeavours". There is no indication that NAM is a significant player either in the Security Council or other organs of the UN. The Ministers did express their views on different political issues but these seem to carry

Brazil's Death Squads Refine Their Methods

Alexander Norris writes from Ze Doca, Brazil

ANTONIO Arruda learned from a rather unexpected source that a contract had been put out on his life.

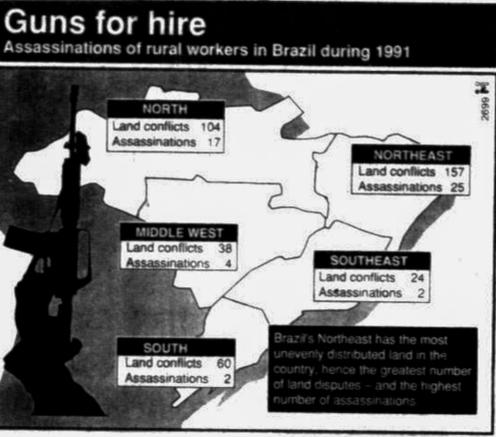
"My nephew is a gunman," the 56-year-old union activist explained with an uncomfortable smile during an interview in this dusty farming town near the edge of the Amazon rainforest.

He works for the big landowners," Arruda went on, "and he's a professional. But when they asked him to kill me, family loyalty won out. He tipped me off."

While reflecting on the sobering news that somebody wanted him dead, Arruda and his friends in the Rural Workers' Union were working on a strategy to prevent him from joining the hundreds of other Brazilian rural leaders who have been assassinated in recent years.

His friends reckoned that the landowner who was rumoured to have offered \$1,500 for Arruda's head had plausible motives to want him killed.

With one of the most concentrated patterns of land ownership in the world, the Brazilian countryside is a violent place. Land-hungry peasants are often murdered by gunmen hired by rich landowners. Now, however, that pattern seems to be changing. As Gemini News Service reports, an analysis of last year's rural assassinations concludes that rather than sponsoring indiscriminate murders, landowners are refining their methods by targeting key church and union activists instead.



It is a pattern repeated all over Brazil. The Pastoral Land Commission (CPT), a group affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church, reports that more than 1,684 Brazilian rural workers have been assassinated since 1964.

Of these, only 25 cases have been brought to trial, and only 14 trials have ended in convictions — a record of impunity that has led a few peasants to carry out their own revenge killings.

highly concentrated patterns of land ownership in the world, and the tiny elite that rules the roost in the countryside wants to keep things the way the are.

Meanwhile, an estimated 12 million rural Brazilians are landless, or do not have enough land to survive.

These people have few options. Over the years, many have fled to the slums in Brazil's big cities, where they eke out an existence as underemployed labourers, prostitutes or petty criminals. Others have fled to the Amazon rainforest, poisoning the rivers with mercury as they pan for gold, or clearing successive patches of forest, planting, then moving on as soils are exhausted.

Still others stay and fight, and it is these peasants who are the most common victims of assassinations' bullets.

As the landowners refine their response to this phenomenon, meanwhile, the number of rural assassinations appears to be dropping. Last year, 54 workers are known to have died — down from 79 in 1990. The report singles out three main reasons for this decline:

• The Rural Democratic Union (UDR), a landowners' group blamed for the hiring and organisation of death squads, is now severely discredited as a political force. International outrage over the 1988 Mendes killing and the subsequent trial of those responsible helped isolate the UDR. "To emerge from this isolation," says the report, "reactionary social forces have changed their tactics," using violence in a more selective way.

• Workers' groups, meanwhile, have "improved their defence mechanisms," denouncing death threats and assassinations more effectively while increasing security for leaders.

• Appeals to international public opinion and pressure on Brazilian authorities have also helped protect lives. The most striking example of this was evident in the Mendes case, the report says.

Landowners generally blame the squatters and their leaders for the violence. "These are anarchists who just want to stir up trouble so they can take power," claims Jose Aparecido Machado, a rancher and lawyer with a local landowners' union.

All the same, he says landowners have the right to use force against hungry rural workers. "The law guarantees that I can take my employees and arm them to protect my lands from invasion," Machado says. He hastens to add that no landowners actually invoke that "right" by contracting gunmen.

to camps where they arrive already indebted for the cost of their journey, work tools and room and board. Their mounting debts are unpayable and soon become an effective instrument in reducing them to subjugation. Surrounded by armed guards, they are shot if they try to flee.

Already the Brazilian government has been denounced for complicity in such outrages. "There is overwhelming evidence," says Amnesty International in a 1988 report, "that a landowners' campaign of intimidation and killing is not only sanctioned but secretly assisted by the authorities.... The police routinely arrest, ill-treat, sometimes torture and illegally evict peasants but fail to bring their killers to justice."

Since that report was written, the government of Fernando Collor de Mello, Brazil's first directly elected president in three decades, has done little to end the longstanding tradition of impunity for landowners who contract gunmen. Nor has Collor shown any real commitment to the one measure that would eliminate the root cause of these rural atrocities: a wholesale redistribution of farmland.

This lack of enthusiasm is hardly surprising. Together with Brazil's powerful private media empires, big landowners gave Collor key backing during his 1989 campaign. On taking office, he named Antonio Cabrera, a former member of the hated UDR, as his agriculture minister. Cabrera continues in that position to this day.

To the Editor...

Stranded Pakistanis
Sir, Congrats, for your excellent efforts in obtaining the interviews in Pakistan of Mr Nawaz Sharif, the prime minister of Pakistan, Ms. Bhutto and Mr. Sartaz Aziz. The Daily Star's sense of journalism is honestly worth the term par excellence in every sense of the word. Let's hope this exemplary act will be an eye opener to others to follow suit.

Coming back to the interviews of both his excellency the PM of Pakistan and Ms Benazir Bhutto, let's hope their observations will form the bedrock of policy during our

prime minister Begum Khaled Zia's Pakistan visit. Especially pertaining to the sharing of assets and the repatriation of the stranded Pakistanis. The interview with the Prime Minister of Pakistan has proved his sincerity as he has been found very receptive to all the aforesaid issues. Hence the ensuing visit of Prime Minister Begum Khaled Zia may turn out extremely fruitful in the entire gamut of our relationship with Pakistan.

Insofar as the stranded Pakistanis are concerned, the PM of Pakistan mentioned about writing to different heads of state for necessary

funds for transport and rehabilitation. A coordinated approach or further persuasion or even an independent approach to solve this disgraceful and pathetic humanitarian problem merits utmost consideration. Why this tragic aspect has been given no or minimum consideration for the last 20 years is a mystery.

The Bangladesh government can stand to gain crores of Taka if this 'stranded Pakistanis' problem of repatriation is brought to a logical end especially now that the present government in Islamabad has not only accepted them as

Stranded Pakistanis but have been painstakingly pursuing to expedite their repatriation. These desperate Pakistanis, during the autocratic rule of more than one occasion tried to breach the Indo-Bangla frontiers for staging a 'long march' to Pakistan which was obstructed with live bullets by our law enforcing agencies resulting in much mental anguish. Repetition of such nightmarish action by these desperados cannot be altogether ruled out, consequences of which under a democratically elected government, can have serious repercussions.

So, the above are the 2 faces of the same coin to which our Amias are manipulating as they please i.e. obstructing the Stranded Pakistanis while chasing the Rohingyas back to the demons for becoming victims of rape, loot, murder and torture. To those simple minds such acts may sound and seem strange and to those who are acquainted know how rife corruption is in the distribution of aforesaid Relief of Stranded Pakistanis. Similarly we find even vide THE DAILY STAR of 23/7/93 of imminent arrival of Australian Aid for the Rohingyas refugees and continuous col-

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