Dhaka, Monday, September 7, 1992

Hopes For NAM

Despite differences among members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit over the Bosnia issue, the consensus reached at the historic Jakarta meeting covers, a much wider ground than many had expected at the start of the conference. For this, credit goes to the moderating role of the host country. Indonesia, to several pragmatic interventions by the much-respected former Tanzanian President, Julius Nyerere, now the Chairman of the Geneva-based South Centre, and to the absence of some radical leaders like Fidel Castro and Moammar Gaddafi. In the end, therefore, the Summit arrived at positions on a number of issues, ranging from reforms of the UN system to the South-South cooperation, which seem as free from the so-called anti-western bias as they are from an aggressive thrust into the future.

in the long run, it may not matter if the NAM takes up a moderate or aggressive posture. What matters most is whether this unique forum of developing nations understands the challenges facing them in the post-cold war era and, what's more, whether it can put into effect various resolutions adopted in Jakarta.

Among all these resolutions, nothing sums up the mood of the Summit better than the call by Nyerere for increased South-South co-operation, one of the many elements in the NAM's drive for self-reliance. As one of the documents presented at the Summit said, in 1990. South-North exports amounted to \$ 1.1 trillion, almost twice the value of South-South exports of \$ 573 billion. It may take many years to reverse the position, but it should be within a year or two to set a new process in motion. In this process, the flow of investment, transfer of technology and even movement of low-interest loans from one developing country to another should figure prominently.

Once this new spirit of self-reliance within NAM starts producing right results, the Third World would gain a bargaining power to deal with the industrialised North from a position of strength on issues ranging from the reduction of trade barriers put up by the West to reforms in the United Nations.

On most of these resolutions, a great deal more work remains to be done before they are put into effect. For example, should the Security Council have more permanent members, perhaps at least two more, from the developing world? Or should NAM press for the abolition of the veto system in order to give more powers to the UN General Assembly? In this context, it is a good thing that the NAM will set up a high-level working group charged with the responsibility of the preparation of concrete proposals for reforms of the UN. Here, NAM should be more concerned with the agencies dealing with aid, such as the World Bank and IMF, and trade, like UNCTAD and GATT, than with the political role of the world body. The ultimate objective of the NAM should be to use the UN system as one of the tools for reducing the disparities between the rich and the poor nations and for creating a just economic order.

The NAM can start moving in this direction if its co-ordinating body, or whatever it may be called in future, functions with greater effectiveness than it has demonstrated in the past. Among other things, it must have its own think tank, equipped with a research division, and a modern communication network that monitors the changes in the world. For the organisation, a lot of hard work lies ahead. There are no short cuts to the success of NAM.

No death is dismissible

This may be coincidental. But is far from dismissible. In three different traffic accidents three persons were killed and eight injured on Saturday. All of these happened in Mymensingh. In rather close proximity: Muktagacha, Trishal and Gouripur. But that's not where the coincidence lay. By traffic death toll standards the casualty tally is paltry. And there lies the catch. None of the involved vehicles collided with each other or rammed against a tree or bridge railings or plunged into some ditch. All of them just ran over their victims — a passenger scooter and 16 pedestrian road-users. Three persons died on the spot — one of the surviving casualties is fighting for life.

At Kaltapara, Gouripur a bus just rode over a scooter in the bright day light of a cloudless afternoon. Of the five passengers, one was instantly killed and the four removed to hospital.

In Muktagacha a minibus ran over and killed a 16-year old boy. Another minibus ploughed through a throng of five persons and killed one

and injured others in Trishal.

It is possible that all the vehicles were socalled 'non-stop' or 'gate-lock' types doing their trips to and from Dhaka within a fixed span of time. These vehicles including the rather famous ones such as Padma and Teesta, which charge premium rates for travelling non stop, do not at all run non-stop but try to make up last time by driving at speeds extremely unsuitable for the vehicles and for the roads and most perilous both for the passengers and for the pedestrians. The small buses with their big payload are unstable from the word go. These have no way to be controlled in face of imminent danger. We do not know of any civilised country allowing something like microbuses to be called minibuses and carrying anything between 35 and 50 passengers. The accident is built into our 'minibuses'. And how can these be depended upon to be used for longhaul trips — day in and day out, year after year?

We have time and again refused to call all of these fatal road events as accidents. Most of these are results of road vices being regularly practised. The government, the transport operators and, strangely enough, the passengers themselves have all a hand in causing these deaths and maim-

Appropriate and truly roadworthy buses running with a regulated road and strictly according to a regulated speed can surely curb such unnecessary deaths and injuries. We reiterate our call for police patrols on the highways, for speed-governors in both passenger and goods vehicles, for duly trained and educated drivers and crew members of the vehicles.

Three deaths is nothing in unpredictable Bangladesh. But can we hardly dismiss that for just-being so small in number. Each human life is equal to all the rest that is there on the earth that's what civilisation is about.

AS DIPLOMATS SEE BANGLADESH

Obsession with the Past Hinders Economic Development

OR a variety of reasons, including some unflattering ones. Bangladesh remains at the receiving end of advices, admonitions and even exhortations from its allies and friends. Sometimes, they are reflected in conversations with diplomats here representing these friendly nations abroad or the donor agencies.

By and large, these envoys are well-meaning persons, who look at the progress in" Bangladesh as part of their concern as it is or should be -- ours. After all, diplomats from donor nations work hard to get this country its legitimate, often generous, share of international assistance. When the country fails to meet its development targets, the case for assistance to Dhaka suffers setbacks and the diplomats in question have some explaining to do to their home governments.

In a lighter vein, I am tempted to recall what we once heard about the involvement of a diplomat in the country he is assigned to. For the first one third of his career, he serves his own country; for the second one third, he serves the interest of country (or countries) he is accredited to; and, for the last one third. well, he serves himselft

Regardless of what one may think of this anecdote, I, for one, take due notice of opinions, suggestions and questions heard from foreign diplomats. They reflect a concern for the country, a concern which seems to be increasing by day with the restoration of democracy. Sometimes it is mixed with a certain amount of bewilderment caused by what even the locals regard as inexplicable developments in the country's political scene.

This being so, I was not particularly surprised at the question that a top-ranking diplomat from a major donor nation put to me the other day, question that many of us have often asked ourselves, but seldom in comparison to another country.

Why is it that while a country like Vietnam looks ahead to its future, Bangladesh goes on living in its past? the diplomat had asked.

But why is this comparison with Vietnam? This is because we had been talking about prospects for investments in Bangladesh and It is amazing that Bangladesh enjoys the luxury of a political debate, often about contentions issues of the past, when more than half its people live below the line of absolute poverty and the country needs massive foreign assistance for its survival.

the diplomat had expressed the view, politely but firmly, that outside the Export Processing Zone, (EPZ) in Chittagong, there has been extremely insignificant investment in this country. Again, the size of foreign participation in

EPZ was also nothing much to talk about. The comparison with Vietnam has a special significance.

With Hanoi opening up to the outside world and introducing liberal pragmatic economic measures, Vietnam has emerged as a strong rival of Bangladesh in attracting foreign investment for countries in East and Southeast Asia with Japan, Australia, Malaysia and Singapore his country, criticises several official policies, blames political parties for problems facing the country and, in the end, often leaves his foreign guest in a state of confusion.

Part of the problem lies in the fact that in a newly-emerging democracy like Bangladesh, a local entrepreneur does not necessarily speak for the government or in support of official policies. But, in Vietnam, still governed along authoritarian lines, negotiations with potential foreign investors follow a set pattern.

Unlike a Vietnamese, a Bangladeshi not only lives in the past but he is also a highly politicised person. There are of course exceptions,

newspapers, in full of contentious issues. On most of these issues, there can be no national consensus. "Unfortunately, a Bangladeshi, a highly educated sophisticated individual, is in no mood to leave these issues alone and concentrate on the job at hand, namely, the economic development," says envoy. This explains, as one foreigner puts it, why

which, as anyone can see from the columns of

a national debate seldom takes up major economic issues and policies, with emphasis on various options and alternatives. Instead, the debate, always a heated one, invariably seems

to be about the past. "Here, one comes up with all kinds of bitter controversies. Political parties would not agree even about the duration of the past authoritarian rule, whether it was for 15 years or nine, or who first thought of independence for Bangladesh, Sheikh Mujib or Ziaur Rahman. It is amazing that Bangladesh enjoys the luxury of this endless debate, when more than half its people live below the line of absolute poverty and the country needs massive foreign assistance just for its survival."

In a sad tone, the diplomat adds, "It is an impossible situation, by any standard."

Among members of diplomatic missions. part of the disappointment lies in the fact that with all their commitment of support for the prevailing democratic system and their realisation that the ousted Ershad regime had done so much harm to this impoverished nation, through corruption and erosion of moral values, they just do not know which way Bangladesh is now heading for.

One redeeming feature in what is otherwise a dismal situation is that several heads of diplomatic missions maintain close contacts with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia, Awami League chairperson Sheikh Hasina and several other national leaders. So, a dialogue goes on through which diplomats offer suggestions and their own evaluations of problems and prospects facing Bangladesh. Unfortunately, it is still anyone's guess as to how many of these suggestions are accepted by either the Prime Minister or the Opposition leader-and how many are just shrugged off.

AT HOME AND ABROAD

ALI

leading the list.

This has several implications. One is, when a foreign investor talks to a Vietnamese, he feels that his local host, perhaps soon to be his partner in a joint venture, has his mind wellfocused on future. A foreign entrepreneur seldom gets the same feeling in his first which is

Bangladeshi businessman. This was said to me by another foreign diplomat when we had brought up the subject at a different get-together for a second opin-

often the last encounter with a potential

There are also differences in business negotiations between Hanoi and Dhaka. A Vietnamese comes up with plenty of facts and figures and presents them against the backdrop of the country's difficulties in transport and communication, among others.

On the other hand, a Bangladeshi is long on generalities but short on facts. He presents a rosy picture of the potential of investment in

1991 Secretes from Yugoslav tederation

independence rieavy fighting

992 EC recognises UN deploys 14 000

like foreign-trained young entrepreneurs and, rather surprisingly, a handful of old-style businessmen. An official of an international agency pins a lot of hope on the young breed, but worries that its efforts to introduce modern management techniques, including rational labour relations, may continue to be thwarted by the continuing politicisation of the national cli-

As one diplomat puts it, quoting an executive of a multi-national company the politicisation goes all the way down the line, generating a restiveness in the middle and militancy at the lowest level.

"We have no training or even the mental outlook in dealing with the South Asian type of labour militancy which is strongly linked to political cross-currents, instead of being based on internal problems within a plant or factory," adds the diplomat.

One diplomat offers some examples of how an educated Bangladeshi lives in the past

Yugoslavia — an Unproductive Show on Bosnia

HE recent conference on Yugoslavia, held in London, is the largest such gathering on this conflict. whose scale in bloodshed and human suffering, has surpassed any in recent times. The conference co-chaired by Prime Minister Mr John Major of Britain and Mr Boutros Ghali, Secretary General of the UN, attracted twenty eight delegations, which included the permanent members of the Security Council of the UN. the neighbours of Yugoslavia, all the factions in Yugoslavia and assorted leaders from near and as far as the US and Japan. The attendance was on the Foreign Ministers level.

This gigantic conference. which lasted three days was preceded by a lot of hand wringing as to how best to deal with a situation which was worsening on the ground by the hour. For during the entire conference, bloodshed in and around Sarajevo did not cease for a minute and even found a well known victim Martin Bell of BBC TV, who is now recu

perating in a London hospital from sharpnel wound. The TV pictures told the story the well heeled gentlemen meet ing in the comfort of London and the Sarajevo sky lit with flames and victims writing on

1967 Nationalist Milosevic becomes

1991 Secedes from Yugostalv

army defeated

992 EC recognises

lederation War Federal

recognition. Serbs attack

August Serbs control 80%.

the ground. Since there was no expectation that troops would go marching in Bosnia and call a halt to the relentless pounding

50mis

Romania

Macedonia

Arshad-uz Zaman writes from London of the city by Serbian guns, the gains achieved by the conference should be considered substantial. For the first time the conference brought

How Yugoslavia collapsed into war Serb-controlled areas toat controlled areas UN protected areas formally Croat controlled Vojvodina Bosnia-Herzegovina Sarajevo Adriatic Sea Montenegro Albania Greece

together all the parties, promised stronger UN presence for humanitarian aid, vowed tougher sanctions, promised to stop 'ethnic cleansing, close camps', station UN monitors for Serbian-Bosnian border. A momentum had been created, which they

OPINION

there was a public dispute between the UN Secretary General and Lord Carrington, which was later smoothed over by what Lord Carrington described as a 'hand some letter' from the Secretary General. Lord Carrington has been loudly complaining about Serbian leaders signing on any paper - placed before them only to go back on them the moment his back would be turned. The media describes Lord Owen as unsympathetic towards the Serbs, who have been literally on the dock during the entire conference. One interesting side show has been the public squabble between Mr Slobodan Milosevic, the Serbian leader and Mr Milan Panic the Prime Minister, who is a US national and earned a fortune in his adopted country. Mr Panic has been making endless speeches

vowed to maintain the forth-

coming Geneva conference,

where a permanent body is to

be set up to oversee the im-

plementation of the London

decisions. Lord Owen, a former

Foreign Secretary of Britain is

to replace Lord Carrington, as

munity's peace effort. It may be

recalled that a few weeks ago.

Head of the European Com-

nothing to back it up. The most glaring failure of the London Conference is the lack of any commitment from

about return of peace to Yu-

goslavia, although he has

the Serbian leader to return territory seized from Bosnia. The TV here has been showing daily the map of Bosnia and the chunk gobbled by Serbia, which leaves precious little for the Muslims. Outside of the loss of human lives, which run into hundreds of the loss of thousands, nearly two million homeless and destruction on a colossal scale, the Muslims have come out as the worst losers in the endless saga. So far it is largely a European effort with UN giving all the support it can muster. Another grave failure of the Conference has been the lack of any commitment to those hapless millions of refugees regarding their return to their homes. And under the weight of the conference it simply ran out of time to discuss Macedonia and more important Kosovo, which many fear could become the next flashpoint.

The stage will now move to Geneva, scene of endless UN related conferences. The worst feature of the Yugoslav drama has been those horrifying pictures coming out of Sarajevo as the London conference ground on and all the assembled Yugoslav leaders, frozen by fear by what was going on in their country, could do no better than mouth platitudes.

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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.

Exercises in futility

Sir. What the Opposition parties have gained, since the general elections, by indulging in hartals, movements, agitations, shutdowns, barricades, protests, denouncements, filibustering, and imaginable and unimaginable negative activi-

What the nation has gained from these non-activities on non-issues, diverting attention from development work (in a non-violent atmosphere)? Whom have they made happy (besides themselves) by their tantrums and passions? How much the country has progressed due to Opposition activities or non-activities since we won or captured the elusive maiden called democracy?

Why the Opposition is holding the whole nation (perhaps) to ransom, to meet its 'demands'? Except announcing the Economic Policy, what else has the major opposition party done, which is visible, and available on paper? Where are its other concrete proposals. excluding the street programmes? Since no nation can be raised on the streets, and in public meetings, then why this "dog-in-the-manger" policy? Can we afford it? How rhetoric and polemics are going to show rising development curves during the next five years?

We started with a new zero last year, and we are still near zero. How much is the Opposition responsible for this retardation and slow-down? Why they virtually do not allow others to work - those who are willing to work. Talk, talk, talk; and criticize and abuse ad infinitum -- is this the definition of getting down to work? Sure it is masterly inactivity:

but where is it leading us? The citizens are not so naive as to think that an AL

government would have worked miracles, because the same national problems had to be solved by the "government". whoever ran it. At best, the difference in quality would have been marginal, because all political parties come from the same society, which has an upper limit on its standard. There is no super standard with any group. So why so much fuss? What are we missing? What AL would have shown us to impress? Why the Opposition cannot agree to the basic wants of life? Why daily normal life is not allowed due to hartal? No party in power would like to create unnecessary situations. Those in power should like to work with minimum fuss. Our Opposition perhaps do not believe in such philosophy.

The mood of the nation is one of impatience, whether it is in the traffic jam, or during a parliamentary session. Much ado about small things. Small minds think in small ways. The current peculiar sensitiveness of the Opposition has to go, in national interest. It does not produce results, only disruption, as we have seen. What does not work should be discarded. Nobody is happy with the defiant, tense atmosphere of constant confrontation. It is all noise and thunder. Who is taking away our country? Are we at war? Yes, maybe with our own Opposition (or vice versa).

The Opposition should announce that it believes in the right to work, without interruption from any source, including anti-work programmes imposed on the nation by the Opposition activities. Blocking daily work is not good politics, by any standard, logic, or an-

The Opposition should keep itself busy, but not in the way it is doing now. If it does not know what else to do, then it

is bankruptcy of ideas, and the nation or the government should not be blamed for it.

We get the Opposition we deserve. Is it not the honest truth? We are fed up of life that includes the Opposition antics. They have shown the nation what they cannot do. after losing the elections. What else can they show? Life is not a circus. After coming out of the tent, we have to get down to business, not politics.

Alif Zabr Dhaka

Refugees remain Sir, Islamic Development Bank will construct a camp in Bangladesh for refugees who fled Myanmar to escape "persecution". The humanitarian contribution will undoubtedly improve the dwelling condition of those displaced people now in emergency shelters that have been in operation ever since the exodus

The refugees have naturally been a burden on LDC Bangladesh and will be affecting the efforts to solve her manifold problems already hindering her development

From the continuing situa tion must a native question as to how long the refugees will be languishing in a foreign land when UN had already advised Myanmar and even Bangla-Myanmar agreement accommodated a date for repatria-

Still, should Myanmar hesitate to reinstate her citizens following agreement, all necessary moves should be made toward international mediation or mandate over the inflicted dilemma afflicting this LDC.

Besides, basing on the truth, Bangladesh has to have an effective position in order to save her economic vitality from eventual degeneration the refugees' affair may result in, when expanding population size has created an almost unbearable pressure on her "scarce resources".

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Back to the Villages

People swarm around offices to seek job as the bees do around the honeycomb. I knew that it was true for men only, but at present it is also happening among women. I have been working in the district towns with women for more than two and a half years. Women aged eight to fiftyeight are turning to me for a job. They come to me not with the hope of making an extra paisa on top of what their fathers or husbands earn, but only to fill their empty stomach. More than four hundred women have been trained in various skills and trades by my organisation — the Trinaful and they are expecting to get a

job with the training set-up. Here, in my set-up Nakshi Kantha and various other items with the kantha stitch are woven. But after the lapse of two and a half years, the question comes to my mind - I have organized so many women (! have refused more as I have not the capacity to oblige them either with work or with training) still, what have I given them in return? It is needless to say, however good may be the standard of their work, they are paid very little.

Women are rushing to the cities with the dream of landing a job, most likely at some garments establishment. They are working in there setting aside the considerations of both self-respect and security. All their dreams are shattered as they come to work here. One has not to go far to find instances of the breaking of marriage for working twelve hours and plus seven days a week on these and similar jobs. Quite a number of such city- returned women come to me for jobs.

Closely connected with this

problem is that of the death in all senses of the villages of Bangladesh and the danger of all-round degeneration of urban life. The endless exodus of lakhs of people everyday towards the cities, implies the death throes of the villages; it is the beginning of the dwindling into the slums of the cities. Here man will have a life of only inhuman suffering - a life neither of honour nor of success. But to the rural life, there is another harrowing, horrifying aspect from which the educated sections of our society prefer to keep off their eyes. In the red light districts of the large cities of India, Pakistan and all the middleeast countries girls from the remote villages of Bangladesh, are being traded in thousands. They are getting lost into the abyss of prostitution. This has become the most inescapable aspect of our present-day reality pushing into near oblivion the traditional culture, and large-hearted humanity and the glorious religious tolerance of Bengal. This process of degradation

cannot be checked without allout efforts from social, political and economic spheres. But that can possibly never be realised through waiting for a national perspective and a national consensus. Everyone has to endeavour with whatever means he or, she has. In my limited, but direct, experience, I have thought out a way; positively effective. It is concerning the problem of providing job to the rural people, especially women. Lakhs of women are getting employed in the garments industries of the large cities. If this garments industry starts going to the villages, this process of degradation can be immensely

This would facilitate, I believe, the women to work in their familiar environments with every social mooring and

interaction remaining intact. I do not know whether it is a feasible idea, but I earnestly request the specialists to ponder over this. It seems that we have already had the realization that the socio-economic progress of the rural people cannot be made by agricultural development alone. Industries have to be constructed in the villages, so that people can find job very near his door. This would to a great extent lessen the number of destitute people in the country, people will have a sense of security, pressure of population on the cities will be reduced. Industries are meant for the people of all classes. Its aim cannot be the profit of a handful of people. This should be recognized first of all and this outlook should be adopted in the policy-making of the state.

My suggestion is not based on emotions merely. I believe that the practical aspects of the proposal deserve consideration. I hope that the intellectuals will throw light on this issue in their writings and it will find place in the editorials of the newspapers. I also call for the attention of the patriotic social workers who will launch organized movements on the national level. Instead of confining this to ink and paper, and holding of symposia only, I crave for determination on the part of the whole nation and the democratic government for the realisation of this dream of a movement back to the villages.

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