

UN Must Clean Up its Act in Somalia

Pushed to a corner by rising media criticisms of the role of some United Nations agencies in Somalia, the world body has convened a major conference early next month to discuss coordination of humanitarian aid to this famine-stricken East African country. The conference, perhaps the biggest ever held on Somalia, will be attended by ministers from several African countries and a number of regional and international bodies. What's more, the UN Department of Humanitarian Affairs will present a "new plan of action" at the conference, which, if approved, would determine the pattern of assistance to the tragic country's 4.5 million starving people before the end of the year.

In the backdrop of scepticism that exists about the UN operation in Somalia, one might not get too excited about the conference. But it is certainly overdue. And it may, one hopes, do some good in saving a sizable number of starving millions in Somalia. But it is a pity that, however successful the meeting turns out to be, it cannot bring back tens of thousands of victims of famine and hunger who have died in recent months needlessly due to bureaucratic mismanagement, looting of relief goods and corruption. These — and other — factors have already taken almost an unprecedented toll in human lives. According to an eye-witness account just published in the *Washington Post* and reproduced by the *International Herald Tribune* of Tuesday, "up to 3,000 Somalis are dying each day, and at least two million are said to be in immediate danger of starvation." Again, to quote from the report, "the combination of famine and lawlessness has driven more than 300,000 Somali refugees into Kenya and displaced at least two million people inside the country."

The international media, especially a responsible newspaper like the *Washington Post*, does not blame only the local authorities or the warring factions for the tragic situation that exists in Somalia. Quoting experts associated with non-governmental organisations, such as the New York-based Human Rights Watch, the press refers to the situation in Somalia "as the greatest failure of the United Nations in our time." This failure is attributed to breakdown in planning, administration and accountability by UN agencies. What's worse — indeed most tragic — there is a growing feeling among responsible people that graft, corruption and even misuse of funds have made their inroads into the system. The *Washington Post* cites examples and sources in making the charge that across the continent, UN officials at various levels have been implicated in a whole range of wrongdoing, from diversion of relief goods to the black market and currency exchange manipulations to embezzlement of aid money and downright kickbacks from contractors.

In the shameful picture that emerges from US press reports, the UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) appears to be the worst offender, followed, by some distance, by the UN Development Programme (UNDP). The sole exception, among the UN agencies, seems to be the UNICEF whose operation, now going on in full swing, is above criticism. A lot of credit also goes to non-UN humanitarian bodies, like the Red Cross, Save the Children and Doctors without Borders.

It is all very well for the United Nations to organise a major conference and present it with a new plan of action. But what is most urgent, it must first clean up its act and regain the confidence of all concerned, especially the donors, in its credibility. Herein lies the key to the success of its future operation in Somalia as well as to the survival of millions, now on the brink of starvation and death.

Tourism, to a Limit

Like all other countries, this nation also observes the World Tourism Day today. There is nothing special either in the fact that all the nations make good use of the occasion in promoting the cause of tourism. In this country, Bangladesh Parjatan Corporation (BPC) is responsible for looking after the tourism business. But as things stand today, the BPC's performances leave much to be desired. With the day's observance remaining confined to a very selected places, one certainly has reason to read in the fact a symbolic import. And the import is that the range and scope of this sector have not been fully recognised, let alone giving it a chance to flourish.

One obvious reason is fund shortage, but proper utilisation of the available resources could make a lot of difference. The failure to preserve and present our places of historical interest in an acceptable manner is, however, not solely related to our fund constraint. A developed sense of history, when well matched by commercial considerations, can do the trick. Whatever little preservation work has been done with a measure of success has been accomplished with international assistance, mostly from UN bodies like the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). But the important point here is that the sites or architectures or monuments had first of all to be placed in their historical perspective and as human heritage for consideration by the international bodies.

Quite evidently, local initiative matters. If we really want to develop tourism in the country, we ought to put emphasis on the presentation of our cultural heritage and indigenous customs. Mere imitation of the lavish decoration and arrangement of the order of some famous holiday resorts will be of no help in attracting foreign tourists. The fact that we have one of the world's worst communication systems stands in the way of people travelling places. In fact, with all other requisite facilities, tourism develops as an industry and, if the sense is further stretched, as a culture. This is what counts most of all.

At a time when the focus has been concentrated on environment, the expansion of tourism industry runs counter to a healthy management of nature. But necessity knows no law. Tourism must develop to the extent it does minimum harm to environment. What is needed is to strike a balance between our economic and environmental needs. The entertainment and educational parts of the business are no less important.

THAILAND seems to have taken yet another hesitant step in its march towards democracy. The people's struggle has been long and bitter and the military has fought a rear guard action at every step. Despite the worldwide trend in favour of democratic form of government the Thai military was unable to read the writing on the wall. The massacre of May 17 could have been avoided if the armed forces made a serious effort to understand the changed circumstances of the country. The urban population of Thailand — particularly those living in Bangkok and other cities — are imbued with modern ideas of human rights and democratic aspirations. The very thought of an unelected Prime Minister had become anathema to them. The new middle class was not prepared to play the military's old game.

The tactics followed by the military in Thailand are no different from those followed in other developing countries. In fact these very tactics were adopted in Pakistan and Bangladesh on a number of occasions during the last four decades. The process usually begins with a campaign to destroy the public image of the politicians. A well-orchestrated publicity blitz is targeted towards the politicians who are painted in the blackest of colours. Tales of corruption are given wide circulation. Since there is almost always some truth in these allegations, the campaign gains credibility among the people. The military take-over takes place after the popular resistance has been softened and neutralized by overt and covert publicity against the political leaders. The next phase in the process is the launching of a political party and a stage-managed election. This is considered essential to confer legitimacy on the regime. We have been an witness to several of these manoeuvres in Pakistan and Bangladesh. In Thailand the people — specially the urban middle class seem to have been fed up with such charades and refused to accept Gen. Suchinda as the Prime Minister and rose against him in a massive show of disapproval and protest. The General had made very elaborate preparations to damage the

A distinguished career diplomat, Mr. Anand emerged as the man of destiny for Thailand. He retired from Foreign Service some years ago and devoted himself quietly to business. It was an accident of history that Gen. Suchinda served under Mr. Anan as military attache when the latter was Thai Ambassador in Washington.

reputation of the politicians opposed to him by dubbing them as "unusually rich". Even if the people believed these charges they also knew that the military leaders were not likely white either. However no one could publicly accuse them of corruption even if this was common knowledge. The mass upsurge of May must have been a shock to Gen. Suchinda who was under the illusion that the Thai people are too docile to protest his rule. Preliminary reactions to the election results suggest that the Thai military has decided to make a retreat — at least for the time being. Whether they will be wise enough to accept the inevitability of their withdrawal from politics is yet to be seen. Indeed this is a phase in the political development process which many Asian countries are currently going through. I hope the events in Thailand have driven home a lesson not only for Thailand but for other Asian countries as well.

The general election held on September 12 clearly shows that despite public expectations to the contrary, Thai politics is yet to shed the pervasive influence of the armed forces. Though the pro-democracy parties have won 185 out of 360 parliamentary seats — a majority of 51 percent, the pro-military parties remain a formidable force. With 175 seats in the Parliament they are in a position to exercise strong influence on the government. In fact one cannot be too sure about the stability of the government based on such slender parliamentary majority. Floor crossing by members — either for ministerial position or simply for money is not uncommon in Thai parliament. One can only hope that the negative public reaction of such defection would act as a deterrent against floor crossing from the government being formed by Mr. Chuan Leekpai — the leader of the Democrat Party.

Very interesting names were given to the two groups of parties by the media and presumably by the educated urban people. The coalition parties led by Mr. Chuan is called the "angels" and the other parties believed to be supporters of the military have been dubbed the "devils". These names reflect the public perception of the image of these parties. Despite these expressions of popular disapproval, the pro-military parties achieved significant victories in many parts of the country — but specially in the rural and relatively backward constituencies of the North Eastern provinces. Their strong showing seemed to dash the hopes of the pro-democracy forces that the election would be a thorough repudiation of the politicians who sided with the armed forces during the May crisis.

ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

Mr. Chuan, a lawyer by profession, has held cabinet posts in the previous governments and is believed to be an experienced politician. A mild-mannered man, he seems to enjoy the support of Gen. Prem Tinsulanonda who has played a key role in diffusing the May crisis by bringing about the resignation of General Suchinda Prem was Prime Minister of Thailand for nearly eight years in the eighties — a period of unprecedented economic growth and progress. Upon his retirement in 1988 the King, as a mark of trust and respect, appointed him a member of the Privy Council. Though the King has been meticulous in performing his role as a constitutional ruler and has scrupulously maintained some distance from politics, his moral influence on the country is enormous. It is for this reason that the support of Gen. Prem for Chuan as the new Prime Minister is so important. The other partners in the coalition of Minister is so important. The other partners in the coalition of "angels" are new but powerful actors in the Thai political stage. Gen. Chavalit Yongchaiyut, the leader of the New Aspiration

Party is a former army chief who is believed to have harboured ambitions for power during his term but failed to dislodge the politicians. He reconciled himself to the political realities of the country and launched a party of his own in order to gain power by democratic means. Despite his military background the people seem to support him as a champion of democracy because he chose the hard but correct path of gaining power through election. The leader of the third party in the coalition — Gen. Chamlong Srimuang — is perhaps the most colourful personality in Thai politics today. A devout Buddhist, Gen. Chamlong is an ascetic who seems to follow the Gandhian way in his personal life. He won landslide victory as the Governor of Bangkok and what is surprising in the context of Thai politics — he continues to have the image of an honest man untainted by corruption. His party — the Palam Dharma — enjoys great support in Bangkok but its influence in the interior of the country is yet negligible. Chamlong led the mass movement against General Suchinda in May but his actual electoral performance has fallen short of expectations.

The power of the older parties with strong support from the business community has once again been demonstrated in the election. In fact, the hope that this election would be different from other elections has not been fulfilled. As in the previous elections, money played a major role in determining the fortunes of contesting politicians — particularly in the rural constituencies. Money is of course important in every democratic system in varying degrees. In the case of Thailand it was a decisive factor. However the

at our first meeting. A man of unquestioned integrity, he has set a very high standard of efficiency and honesty in government which his successors may find difficult to keep up. He reminds me of Justice Shahabuddin who also acted with exemplary honesty and uprightness in fulfilling the mandate given to him by the nation.

Mr. Chuan will begin his administration with a lot of goodwill and popular support. Coming from the South and from humble family background he breaks the tradition of a long line of Prime Ministers either from the military or from aristocratic families. Thanks to the mature leadership of Mr. Anand Panyarachun the political turmoil of the last couple of years did not seriously affect the economic growth process in the country. The new government will therefore find a vibrant and dynamic economy. The fast pace of industrialization has been putting a strain on the infrastructure which needs modernizing. Equally important, the benefits of economic growth has not yet reached a vast number of people — both in the rural areas and urban slums. The new government can achieve better balance in the growth process by ensuring equity and social justice. The fruits of economic growth and development must be spread more evenly. The Chuan government will thus have a difficult task. Obviously it will have to defend democracy as its first priority. But it will also have to run the government with a higher standard of honesty and efficiency. At least this seems to be the expectation of the people. In the long run the political stability and social harmony of the country will depend on the success of its leaders in ensuring that economic growth is accompanied by distributive justice. The Chuan government can justify the name "angel" attached to the constituent parties if they prove different from the so-called "devils" whose wheeling and dealing and corruption had fed up the people. Given the tradition of Thai politics it is not going to be an easy task to preside over a genuinely clean administration.

Non-aligned Seek New Ideological Moorings

by Daya Kishan Thussu

IN their first post-Cold War summit the Non-aligned leaders have called for democratisation of the United Nations system. At the meeting in Indonesia, where the Non-aligned Movement (NAM) was conceived 37 years ago, the 108-member grouping demanded greater powers for the UN General Assembly and permanent Third World representation on the UN Security Council.

At its just ended summit in Jakarta, the 108-member Non-aligned Movement has demanded reform of the United Nations system. In the post-Cold War world the Movement may seem to have lost much of its relevance. Yet given its numerical strength — it is the world's biggest grouping — it has a crucial role in putting the South's case on to the global agenda.

The Non-aligned Movement

Non-aligned Movement was conceived at Afro-Asian conference in Bandung, Indonesia in 1955. 29 nations attended. Its membership has increased four-fold in last three decades



Non-alignment means not tying yourself with military blocs of nations or with a nation. It means trying to view things, independently, and trying to maintain friendly relations with all countries

like Singapore and such pro-Moscow states as Cuba, which even chaired the Movement from 1979 to 1983. The ineffectiveness of the NAM was most starkly evident in the 1990 Gulf conflict arising out of the aggression by one Non-aligned state, Iraq, on another smaller member, Kuwait. Scepticism has grown about the continued relevance of a movement which had its roots in the Cold War at a time when the East-West tension has ended. It has even been suggested by Egypt — one of the founder members — that the NAM should merge with the Group of 77 or even change its name. Critics ask: "Non-alignment against who or what?" Supporters answer that the NAM is against the "superpowerism" of any state. Despite its critics, however, the NAM remains the world's biggest political grouping. In 1961, 25 nations attended the first summit in Belgrade. In Jakarta, 108 countries participated. The NAM recognises that in the post-Cold War world it has to live with US domination. As the summit leaders reassessed the position of Non-alignment they were aware that NAM has failed to formulate a common ideology to safeguard the interests of the developing countries. Three main groups are

emerging within the Movement. The first, led by Egypt and Indonesia, favours closer ties with the West. The second, led by India, wants the Movement to go back to its Nehruvian roots by showing "independence of judgment" on foreign policy issues. This attitude was reflected in a recent interview of Indian Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in *Time* magazine: "People are pointing out that there is now only one bloc, and my reply is, 'Do you want me to align with it? The answer is no, because if I am to remain independent and retain my independence of judgment and action, it does not matter to me whether there are two blocs or three blocs, or one bloc.'" The third group is represented by radical countries like Iran and Cuba which advocate a stridently anti-Western attitude. The Jakarta summit gave an opportunity for politicians to express anti-Western sentiments. President Ali Akbar Rafsanjani of Iran condemned US interference in the Middle East. Foreign Minister Juan Bosque of Cuba criticised the US for its continued economic embargo against the Caribbean island. Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad cautioned against what he called "a revival of the old Western colonialism." On economic issues, it was pointed out that there is increasing polarisation between

North and South with the gap between the poor and rich nations widening. Economic independence through self-reliance was one of the key aspects of the original philosophy of Non-alignment and countries like India practised it too. Economic self-reliance reinforced political sovereignty. But in the age of IMF-dictated structural adjustment programmes and opening up of markets to the West the economic independence of the Third World has been further eroded. The net flow of financial resources is still from the developing to the developed countries. During the 40 years of the Cold War, ideology provided the pretext for the superpowers to play power politics in the Third World. In their proxy wars more than 20 million people were killed in the developing world. Awareness is growing that ideological confrontation is gradually being replaced by economic rivalry within the emerging trading blocs. And the Non-aligned world with its resources and markets will be their battleground. With greater powers at the UN, the NAM could become the vehicle for Third World diplomatic solidarity. In addition, its emphasis on greater South-South cooperation could help check economic exploitation of the developing countries in the so-called new world order. Indonesian President Suharto, who has taken over the NAM chairmanship for the next three years, told the summit that the "new world order" had not changed the "old patterns of domination of the strong over the weak and rich over the poor." — Gemini News

To the Editor...

Foreign Affairs Cadre of BCS
Sir, In Bangladesh, International Relations is taught only at Dhaka University. Generally, the students securing higher positions in the admission test get chance to study International Relations. There is a general belief that who studies International Relations becomes a diplomat. The students, before getting admitted, also hold such a view but after passing several years in Dhaka University, coming in closer understanding with the problems of society, including unemployment, they become utterly disgruntled. In my opinion, the students

of other departments are fortunate than the students of International Relations Department of Dhaka University. In each announcement of Bangladesh Civil Service recruitment, there are no more than one dozen seats earmarked for the Foreign Affairs Cadre. This small number of the seats are very often bagged by others, since the students of International Relations generally do not stand up because they are to answer descriptive questions which do not procure cent per cent marks. There is a separate Judicial Cadre for the students of law in the BCS which lessens the competition for them. The students of International Relations

study this discipline theoretically. Therefore, certainly, they do comprehend the dynamics of international actions to some extent better than the other general and technical faculty students. In this backdrop, the Bangladesh Public Service Commission is requested to reserve the meagre member of seats of the Foreign Affairs Cadre of BCS only for the students of International Relations. Md Abdur Rouf, Department of International Relations, DU

Beyond Gulf war
Sir, When (private) attraction goes out of bounds, no-

body can predict what exactly is going to happen. Apparently that is why (?) a 24-year young Kuwaiti female came to reunite with her Bangladeshi male partner. But, their plans for happy life hangs in balance now because of Kuwait's demand for her return even after the "odd couple" became wedlocked on Bangladeshi soil defying state laws and traditions of her nationality. From the standpoint of human rights, the human impulse to interact with others must not be interrupted and, therefore, their legitimised affair deserves congratulations, no matter how costly and how

genuine their terms of endorsement are. Now that "she got her man" after overcoming barriers from border to honeymoon and closing up gaps from cultural to ethical, diplomatic drawback should not stick in between interpersonal relations. Most importantly, whatever their story is, this sort of life drama that has been happening for centuries in multinational world, will be enriching Bangladeshi literary treasure with driving significance of cross-cultural relationship in the advancing civilization. M Rahman, Zila School Road, Mymensingh

Khwaja Wasiuddin's siblings
Sir, Your recent news story on the death of Lt. General Khwaja Wasiuddin mentioned incorrectly that he leaves behind three sons and only daughter. In fact my late uncle, Lt. General Khwaja Wasiuddin has four sons and two daughters. His eldest son Khwaja Saif Wastuddin and his elder daughter Mrs. Umberreen Rahman reside in Pakistan. Mrs Yasmeen Murshed Banani, Dhaka