

Stage is Set for Confrontation at the UN

Welcome to Premadasa

President Ranasinghe Premadasa is assured of a warm welcome from the people and the government of Bangladesh when he arrives here today on a three-day official visit.

President Premadasa's visit to Dhaka assumes special significance in view of the fact that it is Bangladesh which hosts the SAARC Summit in just over two months time, with Prime Minister Khaleda Zia taking over the chairmanship of the alliance from the Sri Lankan leader.

As expected, the two leaders and their officials will take the advantage of the visit of Premadasa to discuss a number of bilateral issues between Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Here, there are no outstanding problems to be resolved, which leaves the two countries free to explore the untapped potential in their economic relations.

What the two leaders — Khaleda Zia and Premadasa — should worry about belong to another area, in the problems in bilateral relations among member countries. While preserving the consensus that we should not let these problems stand in the way of progress of SAARC, we can certainly see how informal exchanges among leaders during a summit — or, for that matter, between the two heads of governments in the next three days — can help in promoting better understanding among SAARC members.

Rights of Children

The Children's Right Week is now being observed as part of a UN effort to promote the Convention on the Rights of the Children. The inauguration of the week by the Prime Minister herself and her joining in a colourful rally of children on Tuesday last, however, belies the obtaining situation in the country — so far as the rights of the majority of children are concerned.

Children fortunate enough to attend the function organised on the occasion may have their own share of the rights problem, but the vast number of the poor and rural children are not even expected to hear about the issue. It is these children who really deserved to know what their rights are and how they could enjoy — albeit partly — those rights.

It needs hardly any elaboration that when children's lives are so vulnerable, their rights are only constantly flouted by various acts of society. Hunger and disease make most of the poor children's lives miserable. If the message of the Children's Right Week could be meaningfully reached to these hapless children, the occasion might have served at least some of the purposes.

Considered against the backdrop of the closing down of 26 Shishu Kalyan (formerly Pathakali Trust) schools out of 72, the ambivalence between the reality and the rhetoric of our leaders becomes clear. Notwithstanding its many shortcomings, the Trust's programme for educating the uncared-for children has proved to be quite fruitful. The good work ought to be continued.

We may be one of the first signatories to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Children, the International Labour Organisation may have stipulated that underaged children should not be forced to hard labour but the reality is that children are doing works incompatible with their age and strength.

MID-SEPTEMBER is the time when international attention shifts to New York. The United Nations General Assembly begins its annual session lasting until mid-December. Efforts to reduce the duration of the session did not succeed.

Talks about the reform of the UN has been heard in the corridors and halls of the UN for a number of years. This year these talks have assumed a sense of urgency because of the priority attached to them by the Non-Aligned Summit.

Year after year, following a predictable pattern, the Western news media carried negative stories on the alleged failures of the UN and its specialized agencies. In fact the Western news media became hostile to the entire UN system after the UNESCO, under the leadership of its then Director-General Mr Ibok launched the concept of a New International Information Order.

The United States used the negative media image of the UN in initiating a campaign for reform to suit its needs. Under the Reagan administration the UN was starved of funds and the financial crisis that was created as a result was used to put pressure both on the Secretary-General and the Third World countries to force these reforms.

As an ultra-conservative American research institute — the Heritage Foundation — spear-headed the campaign. Some of the European countries — notably Britain — supported by Australia, gave some weight and credibility to these efforts. In the early eighties the Western perception of the UN was an organization which, though established and funded by them, was no longer under their control.

The range of investments is very wide. Among recent projects — Samling Electronics is combining with the telecommunications authority of China's Tianjin city to set up a factory to assemble 600,000 video cassette recorders a year.

South Korean shipowners have started a regular shipping line for cargo and passengers between Incheon on South Korea's west coast and Tianjin, which is the port for Beijing.

So perhaps it is no surprise to discover that Taiwan's trade and investment relations with mainland China are actually flourishing. Trade between them will surpass US\$7 billion in 1992 (it was already US\$5.8 billion last year).

But the truth is difficult to get at. Neither Taipei nor Beijing likes these figures to be published, because they expose their long-term political enmity for the fraud that it is. Both capitals prevent all social and political links, and threaten dire punishment for offenders.

The answer is: a little place called Hong Kong. Taiwanese funds and people are legitimately sent into the British territory (which has no quarrels with Taipei). And then, suitably couched through Hong Kong companies and bank accounts, it flows over the border into the mainland.

Some of the funds take this circuitous route to land up in Fujian province, in cities which are only a dog's bark away from Taiwan's offshore islands.

The list of Fujian projects is long, and among them are these — the river Buriganga from where abundant water supply could be arranged at a very cheap rate instead of the current arrangement of extracting water through deep tube-wells.

our modern songs. Like Ms Roksana, we remember Laila Muzammil, a newscaster who is also a good singer.

M Zahidul Haque Assistant Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural Institute, Dhaka

WASA water rate

Sir, It has come to our notice through ads published in a few dailies that WASA is going to increase the water rate again. It may be mentioned here that WASA has been increasing the water rate and has increased it ten folds during the course of the last ten years.

had by then secured considerable influence over the General Assembly.

In fact, with the exception of the Security Council where the veto protected their authority and power, the Western bloc was outvoted in all the organs of the UN and the specialized agencies.

The developed countries were also frustrated at the heavy tilt in the UN agenda in favour of issues reflecting Third World concerns. These countries wanted the UN to devote its resources to assist their development effort.

It may be noted that 44 per cent of the member states pay the minimum assessment of one-hundredth of one per cent of the UN budget. The small and poor countries numbering 70 per cent of the total membership — collectively pay only two per cent of the budget.

There is another reason for Western criticism against the UN. In their perception the highest objective of the UN as stated in the first line of the preamble to the Charter which refers to the "scourge of war," and "the untold sorrow to mankind," that it has brought twice in the life time of its founding fathers. Peace-keep-

ing, in their view, ought to be the highest priority.

Although most of the regional conflicts have taken place in the south, the priorities of the developing countries, at least in the UN, have been in economic and social fields. The diversion of the UN's attention to activities which held only marginal interest for them was certainly not very welcome to the Western powers.

States. After all, the United States pays as much as 25 per cent of the total budget of the UN.

Sensing the mood of the member countries Mr Perez de Cuellar went along with the Western initiative to establish a high powered group consisting of 18 members to study the problem and recommend comprehensive reforms. During the mid-eighties this was a major preoccupation of the member countries and the secretariat. The net result of the exercise was rather modest. A staff reduction exercise along with a cut in the number of senior level officials was carried out.

A new campaign for reform seems to be gathering steam. The end of the cold war has increased the usefulness of the UN to the great powers. The Gulf War demonstrated its use-

fulness. Whereas in the past, super power confrontation paralysed the Security Council, the elimination of the Soviet Union as a rival left the United States free to utilize the Council for peace-keeping and other security-related purposes.

The Washington Post recently commissioned a study of the UN. A series of articles entitled "The UN empire" examined the recent activities of the UN to bring out its shortcomings and failures.

According to the article the UN is "mired in an excess of people and paper". Indeed the study found very little in the UN to praise. Allegations have been made that the bureau-

cracy is too large, that it produces too many papers, that it is inefficient and corrupt. The peace-keeping operations are examined through to point accusing fingers both at the top management and the field officers. The handling of the African problems — specially the one in Somalia and the Cambodian operation have been reviewed in great detail.

Most of the information seem to have been collected from NGOs and Western diplomats not too favourably inclined towards the world body. The ambivalence of the NGOs towards UN is well known. However I do not intend to defend the UN in this article or rebut the allegations point by point. The UN itself will no doubt do it in due course. The Washington Post is a highly respected newspaper with a solid reputation for fairness and objectivity.

ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

Beijing-Seoul Accord Opens World's Newest Economic Frontier

EVER since the Korean War, when China sent troops to support North Korea, Seoul and Beijing have been incommunicado.

Diplomatic relations were restored on August 24 and another corner of the 40-year Cold War faded into history.

But there was a sharp reaction in Taipei, which immediately closed its Seoul embassy, ended all flights to and from South Korea by the two national airlines, and cancelled a large order for Korean vehicles. The government in Taiwan had assumed that China would insist that Seoul should break all its ties with Taipei (which, in fact, it did not).

Political questions apart, the economic effects of this new situation in Northeast Asia could be considerable. Both South Korea and Taiwan are already playing a very active role in trade and investment links with China, even without diplomatic ties.

China-South Korea trade had already begun to soar in 1991, and in 1992 total exports plus imports are expected to exceed US\$10 billion. South Korean investors have already flocked to China, which offers them some distinct advantages — it is close, it has a mass of cheaper labour, and there is already a large number of ethnic Koreans in China's northeastern provinces.

In the first half of 1992 alone, South Korean investors registered 108 projects in China, involving the equivalent of US\$85 million. Much larger figures are expected to be announced in the second half, and total investment may reach US\$500 million by year's end.

Betty T Ildfonso writes from Hong Kong

ment in Taiwan feels aggrieved and abandoned.

As distinct from its political condition, however, Taiwan's economic position in the world is unrivalled. It has been among the fastest-growing economies of all times and, based on an island which lacks many resources, has raised the productivity of its people by leaps and bounds.

So perhaps it is no surprise to discover that Taiwan's trade and investment relations with mainland China are actually flourishing. Trade between them will surpass US\$7 billion in 1992 (it was already US\$5.8 billion last year).

But the truth is difficult to get at. Neither Taipei nor Beijing likes these figures to be published, because they expose their long-term political enmity for the fraud that it is. Both capitals prevent all social and political links, and threaten dire punishment for offenders.

The answer is: a little place called Hong Kong. Taiwanese funds and people are legitimately sent into the British territory (which has no quarrels with Taipei). And then, suitably couched through Hong Kong companies and bank accounts, it flows over the border into the mainland.

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re being built on the busiest shopping street in Beijing, together with modern shopping malls in Shanghai and Canton.

Funds have gone into a sodium glutamate factory on China's tropical island of Hainan, a tomato-paste plant in Xinjiang province in the far northwest, and into a flour mill in Tianjin in the northeast.

To crown the new — real — relationship between Taipei and Beijing, a mainland bank and a Taiwan bank recently came together as partners in

countries. While Western countries have been voicing these concerns about the UN, the developing countries seem to have crystallized their own ideas for reforming the UN. This was a major issue at the Jakarta Non-Aligned Summit.

In speech after speech the heads of governments made it clear that the reforms sought by the developing world were quite different from those advocated by the industrialized countries, especially the United States. For the developing states, reform means upgrading the authority of the 179-member General Assembly, curtailing the veto rights of the five major powers and expanding UN economic and social programmes.

This is the very opposite of what the rich countries want. They want to curb the growth of the economic and social programmes, streamline the bureaucracy and eliminate waste, duplication, mismanagement and corruption. The stage is thus set for a confrontation.

As an indication of its seriousness, the NAM Summit has established a high-level working group to develop proposals aimed at the "revitalization, restructuring and democratization of the United Nations system". Berating "those who seek to preserve their privileged positions of power" in the UN, the final communique called for a review of "the veto powers which guarantee an exclusive and dominant role" for the five permanent members of the Security Council.

Mr Butros Butros-Ghali, the Secretary-General is caught in the middle. An Egyptian national, he cannot ignore the NAM decisions. At the same time he had secured the support of the big powers, presumably by giving assurances to them that he would carry out the reforms that they have been seeking for some years. In fact he started cutting the number of senior posts immediately after getting elected

to his post. Unfortunately this seems to have pleased neither side.

With the NAM working group formulating its own agenda for reforms, his dilemma is likely to worsen in the coming months. It should, of course, be added that the NAM countries may not be able to maintain the unity they demonstrated in Jakarta once concrete proposals are taken up. For example, how many new members are to be added to the Security Council?

India is reported to have already staked its claim on the ground of its size and influence in regional and international affairs. Others like Egypt and Nigeria in Africa and Brazil in Latin America are known to harbour these aspirations. The Japanese and the Germans make no secret of their desire for seats in the Council. These are defeated powers of the Second World War but today the world is on a new course — quite different from the one which shaped world politics for almost half a century. The claims of these two economic giants cannot, therefore, be dismissed lightly.

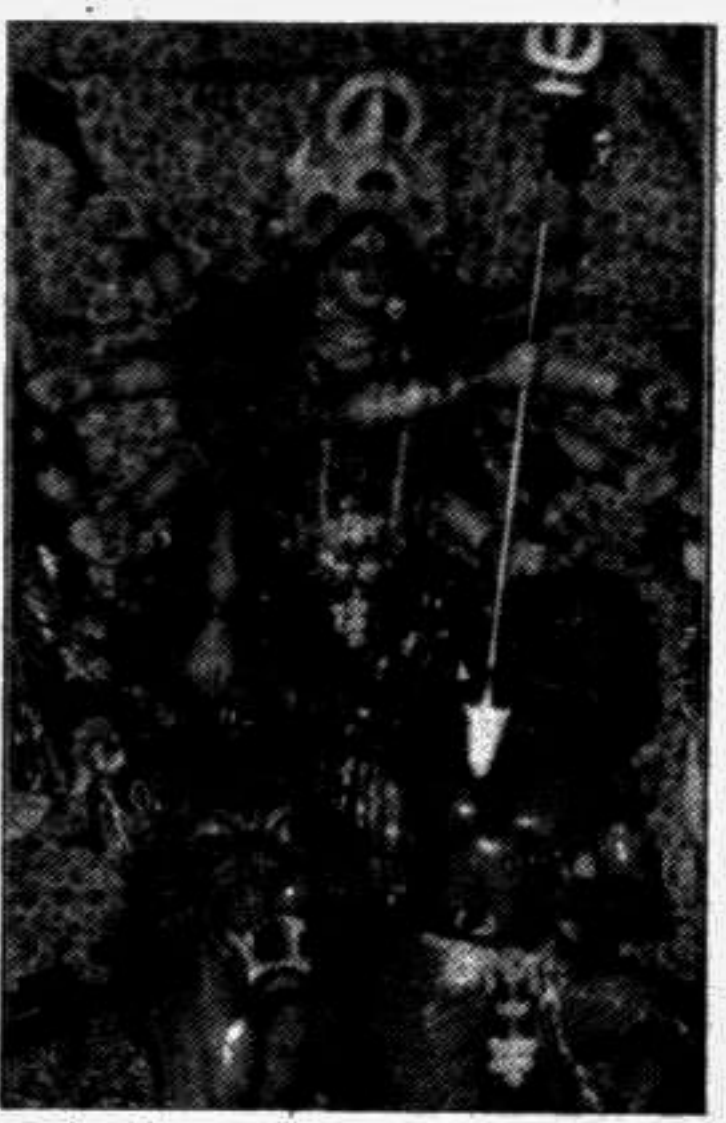
The current session of the General Assembly will no doubt go into all these issues but given their complexity it may not be able to come up with solutions. Bangladesh, like other developing countries has a vital stake in the world body. Indeed all the relatively small countries of the world have a special stake in the UN. In a world in which might is still right it is the best device that mankind has been able to devise to give some measure of security to the small states.

It is my earnest hope that the government would undertake in-depth studies to formulate our brief on this question. Instead of ad hoc decisions we should have well thought-out and clearly defined goals in dealing with these complex issues which will have implications for the country not only in the immediate future but in the decades ahead.

The Advent of Durga

Dr Mahanambrata Brahmachary Maharaj

THE mundane existence of human being is replete with strife, struggle and miseries. Sufferings and torments of innumerable sorts make the human life immensely woeful. A total cessation of these evils, emancipation from the clutch of bondage and attainment of a state of perpetual bliss are all that yearned by suffering humanity. But man's superior intellect, wisdom and inventions failed to bring a real solution to these problems.



festation and the source of ultimate goal of all perfection and attainment of all existence. She is essentially Unique and One. The Mahadevi is Omnipotent, Ubiquitous and Omniscient. But strangely enough, all extremes emanate from Her. Both bondage and bliss spring from Her divine nature. She is the fountain-head of the highest good-both spiritual attainment and material prosperity.

The superb homage to the Divine mother pacified Her wrath. The turbulence diminished and was replaced by infinite pleasure and affection so much so that she was inclined to bestow any offering to the Devas on prayer. The Devas seized this golden opportunity not only for themselves but for the suffering humanity as well. They were assured of eternal security on mere uttering the mother in times of danger. At the same time, it gained Her acceptance that anybody in his distress eulogizing Her with this particular hymn (Mahisahantri Stuti) would receive the Divine grace, relief from all his afflictions and profound bliss.

with the numerous weapons offered by the gods. Thus descends the Divine mother, the supreme being, energy-incarnate who embodies in Herself the multifarious modes of life. She is affectionate to Her children and enraged against those who tend to do evil to the latter.

All contradictions merge in her majestic personality. She is tranquil and turbulent, serene and fierce, soumya and rudra at the same time. This is because Her all embracing motherliness makes Her intolerant of those that are intimately disposed towards Her human and divine children. The Divine Mother in a fit of destruction raised such a tumultuous uproar that the frightened Asuras came out in large numbers being equipped with armours and weapons. The severe war that followed between Her and the innumerable Asuras brought the ruin of Mahisasura. The other Asuras met same fate. The heaven was recovered and the Devas cheered the victory with an elegant hymn addressed to the mother.

The obeisance of the cheerful Devas to Mahadevi Durga is a revelation of Her divine personality. She is the progenitor of the universal process in its entirety. She is the guiding principle of the cosmic mani-

To the Editor

Music cassette

Sir, Recently I listened to a Bangla music cassette of Ms Roksana Anwar who happened to be a TV newscaster. In the cassette titled "Ghum Ghum Chand", she presented some old popular Indian Bengali songs. She of course sang quite well and according to reports her cassette also sold well. But I think, since Ms Roksana is neither a common singer nor singing is her profession, she could, therefore, in her cassette render some original songs of her own homeland, Bangladesh.

Anyway, I appreciate her art of singing. Nowadays, in our country, we find prominent artists of one discipline showing command over other disciplines as well. I remember the name of our late film star, Zafar Iqbal, who was not only an outstanding cinema artiste but a good singer also. Late Zafar gave a new dimension to

the river Buriganga from where abundant water supply could be arranged at a very cheap rate instead of the current arrangement of extracting water through deep tube-wells. This involves higher cost and also adverse effect on environment especially on plants and trees which maintain the ecological balance so essential for a city like Dhaka whose population will be around 10 million by the end of the present century.

We, on behalf of the citizens of Dhaka, earnestly appeal to the concerned authorities that no further increase of water rate should be made at the stage since everybody is economically hard hit.

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