### 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. This is part of the Sri Lankan leader's tour as the chairman of the South-Asian Association for Regional Co-operation (SAARC), indeed a thoughtful gesture on the part of chief of the seven-nation alliance to exchange ideas with leaders of fellow-members of the grouping on problems and prospects facing SAARC.

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. The fact that the SAARC chief has already covered four other capitals of the region would enable him to brief Khaleda Zia on what he has seen and heard in those countries. This, we believe, should be of immense value to our Prime Minister. To get the most out of the three-day visit of the Sri Lankan leader, the discussion should be free, frank and thorough. To start with, both sides should admit that progress so far made by the seven-nation alliance is extremely modest. The fact that it manages to carry on, with a few projects in hand. seems to be its major achievement to date. However, it is a good thing that instead of taking a pessimistic view of its future, members of the alliance remain conscious of its potential and that too not in abstract terms but in the light of a number of proposals due for presentation before the December summit. A key to the success of SAARC is to bring the private sector closer to the alliance in the hope that entrepreneurs will look closely at the prospects of regional joint ventures. at the increased trade among SAARC nations and even at exchange of technology and knowhow between one member and another. The establishment of an information network should prove as practical as the setting up of a consultative body linking representative trade bodies in all seven countries.

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. An aviation agreement to enable the national airlines to link the two capitals - Dhaka and Colombo - is expected to be discussed during the visit. The trade between the two countries which was negligible at the start of the eighties has grown appreciably. but the size of the two-way movement of commodities still remains modest. As long as the two countries can expand their economic co-operation. Dhaka should not worry too much that the balance of trade is currently in favour of Colombo.

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. Herein lies what we might call a hidden political role of SAARC, a role that, if played unobtrusively, can only add to the strength of the seven-nation alliance.

#### 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. One cannot help asking which children's rights are in question. Even the parameter of their rights is much too obscure for a general understanding.

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. Better it would have been if some concrete measures were taken for changing the lot of these children.

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 rhetorics 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. It may not be enough for the enormous need, but with the expansion of the programme and also addition of a few more innovative measures, this could indeed serve a most useful purpose for the poor children in the country

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. What is still more deplorable is that such works are either unpaid or nominally paid. This must change. They have to be adequately paid for the works done, no matter what the child labour laws say.

## NAM Reform Proposals vs. Western Priorities

# Stage is Set for Confrontation at the UN

# ID-SEPTEMBER to the time when internato New York. The United Nations General Assembly begins its annual session lasting until mid-December. Efforts to reduce the duration of the sesston did not succeed. The agenda, after all, is long and the problems faced by he member countries are numerous and complex.

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. The developed countries, who have been demanding reforms were also the most vocal crit-

ics of the world body. 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 Mbow launched the concept of a New International Information

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. 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 Third World countries, organized under the banner of the Group of 77 and

the Non-Aligned Movement had by then secured considerable influence over the General

In fact, with the exception of the Security Council where the veto protected their autherity and power, the Western block was outvoted in all the organs of the UN and the specialized agencies. The voting strength of the Third World countries and also some of the controversial resolutions passed by them - specially those on Israel - created an anti-UN mood among the industrialized countries.

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. As a result, economic programmes were enlarged and new programmes and entities were created. It was no surprise that in the eyes of the developed countries this was tantamount to wasting their tax payers money in enlarging the UN bureaucracy. They resented, what they called, "proliferation" of the UN agencies and their

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 percent of the total membership - collectively pay only two percent of the budget. A dozen industrialized countries, on the other hand, pay over 80 per cent of the budget. The principle of equality of sovereign states and that of financial accountability, according to some Western diplomats, are in conflict in the UN.

There is another reason for Western criticism against the UN. In their perception the highest objective of the UN is 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 re-

gional 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. Even the Nordic countries which have been usually supportive of the UN's development-oriented agenda , were genuinely convinced that the bureaucracy had become to big and inefficient, that there had taken place a proliferation of UN agencies and entities which were not very useful and that the Third World countries were not paying enough attention to the sensitivities of

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. Naturally the United States and its allies are looking

machinery very closely. 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. The picture that comes out of the study is not pretty.

at the effectiveness of the UN

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-

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, gaining increased representation on the Security Council, 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 privi-

leged 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-Ghalt, 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 im-

mediately after getting elected

to his post. Unfortunately this seems to have pleased neither

The Buily Star 4

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 given 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.

# ON THE RECORD

by Shah AMS Kibria

States. After all, the United cracy is too large, that it pro-States pays as much as 25 per- duces too many papers, that it cent of the total budget of the

countries such as the United

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. Between 10 to 12 per cent of the staff strength was reduced but the basic structure of the secretariat was left unchanged.

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-

is inefficient and corrupt. The peace-keeping operations are examined threadbare to point accusing fingers both at the top management and the field officers. The handling of the 'Airican 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 in tend 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. Perhaps one can simply say that the ar ticles reflected the views and concerns of the Western

### Beijing-Seoul Accord Opens World's Newest Economic Frontier tre being built on the busiest Thailand.

VER since the Korean War, when China sent troops to support North Korea, Seoul and Beijing have been incommunicado. That is, until now.

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 immediatcly 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 northeastern China's

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

The range of investments is very wide. Among recent pro-Samsung 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

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

Seoul has several reasons for making friends with Beijing. Not least among them is the recent signing of the North American Free Trade Area treaty between the United States, Canada and Mexico. Seoul feels threatened by that treaty, which might well shut out Korean exports of electronics and textiles. South Korea is thus seeking new markets, and what closer ones exist than China - and, of course, Russia?

The whole area of northeast Asia — eastern Russia plus Japan plus the two Koreas plus a dozen cities in northern China — will become one of the world's new economic fron-

It has raw material resources in abundance, and the finance and technological experience to use them. Only the political chaos and cruelties of the last 75 years have held this area from economic success.

But what of Taiwan? South Korea was, in fact, the last country in Asia to have full diplomatic relations with Taipei (if we except the Asian Development Bank as an entry - Taiwan is still a full member of that institution under the strange title of "Taipei, China"). Naturally, the governBetty T Ildefonso writes from Hong Kong

electronics.

The Taiwan money now

stretches almost throughout

China — including participa-

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). Tatwanese investment in its giant neighbour is estimated to be as big as US\$10 billion - if the true total were revealed.

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

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 coursed 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 is-

The list of Fujian projects is long, and among them are

shopping street in Beijing, together with modern shopping A US\$20 million scheme for a giant bleyele-tyre factory malls in Shanghai and Canton. in Xi'amen (which in the old Funds have gone into a

trading days was called Amov. sodium glutamate factory on famous for tea and porcelain China's tropical island of and the trans-Pacific galleon Hainan, a tomato-paste plant in Xinjiang province in the far northwest, and into a flour mill Factories producing inin Tianjin in the northeast. stant noodles, garments and

To crown the new - real relationship between Taipei and Beijing, a mainland bank and a Taiwan bank recently tion in a new commercial cen- came together as partners in Korea.

The Bank of China, which is Beijing's foreign exchange bank and has a very tall, glasscovered headquarters in Hong

Kong, joined the Bank of Kaohsiung, based in Taiwan's busy southern port town, to take up part of a bond issue by That Farmers Bank. To make the fssue even more picturesque, it was organised by Japan's Sanwa Bank, and included three banks from Singapore and one from South - Depthnews Asia

# The Advent of Durga

Dr Mahanambrata Brahmachary Maharaj

HE 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. An aggravation of all these is experienced on the other hand. Today, the confusions of the world make it, so to say, a vicious circle. Man has created such an environment that it reacts unwholesomely upon him. Mankind is terribly heading as if towards a total annihilation by indulging in licentious activities. Heart-rendering cry for peace, happiness and poise is heard from all corners of this bewildered world.

The state of affairs resembles that of the Devas during the reign of Mahisasura. In the course of the eternal strife of the Devas (gods) and Asuras (demons), the former being deseated, the latter reigned supreme in the heaven inflicting untold sufferings on the Devas. The helpless Devas came to Brahma, the creator of the world, for alleviation of their distress. Brahma, afflicted with the sorrows and sufferings of the Devas, led the commission of the gods to Vishnu and Shiva for appraisal of the grave situation and redress.

The tales of intolerable atrocities of Mahisasura gave rise to vehement anger in Vishnu and Shiva and in a fit of this their vital energies in the form of burning flashes came out from them. This created similar reaction among the gods whose vital energies too came out in like manner. These energies found expression through an unmatchable,

sublime and superb woman.

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 flerce, soumya and rudra at the same time. This is because Her all embracing motherliness makes Her intolerant of those that are inimically 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 Mahadev 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-

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.

The worship of the Divine Mother would ensure our communion with her. The constant communion with her would promote the development of friendly relations and universal fraternity. It would endow us with the realisation of unity in multiplicity. We, the suffering humanity stand on the same platform of universal brotherliness in relation to the Divine Mother. May our Mantra Puja become fruitful. Today, when barbarous acts have outraged the conscience of the mankind and a threat of total annihilation is hovering upon us, we pray to the Divine Mother for succor to save us from the tyranny and turmoil of national and international life of a confused world order.

Dr Mahanambrata Brahmachary Maharaj is ex-international Secretary, World Fellowship of Faiths, USA

#### 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 cassettee 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 artistes of one discipline showing command over other disciplines as well. I remember the name of our late film star, Zafar Igbal, who was not only an outstanding cinema artiste but a good singer also. Late Zafar gave a new dimension to

Roksana, we remember Laila Mozammel, a newscaster who know, BTV announcers, Laila Banu and Anjali Mostafa are also singers of modern song and Nazrul Giti respectively. We are looking forward to find their numbers too.

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

Bangladesh is a riverine country and Dhaka stands on

our modern songs. Like Ms the river Buriganga from where abundant water supply could be arranged at a very is also a good singer. As far as I cheap rate instead of the current arrangement of extracting water through deep tube-well. 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. Dabiruddin Ahmed

President Officers/Employees Welfare Planning, Ministry of Implementation Monitoring

This divine-embodiment of all spiritual energies is arrayed and Evaluation Division, Dhaka