Dhaka, Friday, July 1, 1994

Undimmed Importance of G-77

The Group of 77, better known as the G-77. the formation of developing countries in the United Nations system, has just observed the 30th anniversary of its founding. The event passed off nearly unnoticed even in the developing world. The G-77 itself did not call for a fanfare to mark the occasion. All that it did was to hold a special ministerial meeting of the developing countries at the UN in New York to commemorate the anniversary. However, not all the ministers did attend.

The low-key appearance of the celebrations does not necessarily imply that the developing nations are losing their urge for cohesion in facing economic issues of common concern at global forums. Yet, the possibility cannot be dismissed altogether that the pace of globalization of economies and the emerging new trade polarizations could cool off the enthusiasm of the developing countries to forge a common approach to the problems that confront the poorer nations of the world.

In recent years, developing countries have increasingly been coming up to share same economic and trade groupings with the world's leading industrial nations. The initiatives for forging such new alliances have usually come from the richer nations. The Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum is one such instance of industrial nations establishing direct economic links with developing countries for coming to a common platform on trade matters. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has created a powerful trading bloc which includes one developing country as its member. And the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) known for long as Capitalism's club, is admitting developing countries in its fold.

Some developing countries are thus getting into the big league alright. However, many more are being left out in the cold. Some analysts fear that the process might sow seeds of dissension in the developing world. Some even hark back to the old policy of divide and rule from the days of colonialism in the past. There is yet another view which holds that the industrial nations were losing their leverage on the developing countries, particularly after the emergence of new economic power-houses in east Asia and elsewhere.

The recently concluded Uruguay Round global trade agreement did indeed create hopes for a new era of cooperation among all the trading nations of the world. However, as the euphoria over the agreement fades, developing countries are coming to realise that they would still have to come to grip with a plethora of thorny issues brought up by the industrial nations. Linking trade privileges to observance of certain labour and environmental standards, human rights and child workers issue, intellectual property safeguards and technology transfers - all these and many other problems remain to be sorted out.

Times for distrust are not over yet. It would, not do to downsize G-77. At its 30th anniversary meeting, calls were issued for increased vigilance on the part of the developing countries, particularly against new forms of protectionism designed by the industrial nations to deny market access for low-cost goods produced by the emerging economies. G-77 has to remain fully active to help the developing countries evolve common policies and take a joint stand on issues that affect them collectively.

Japan's Political Lunge

In a surprise denouement, produced by an apparently unlikely coalition between the Liberal Democratic Party and the Social Democratic Party, the Chairman of the last-named party, Tomiichi Murayama, has become Japan's new Prime Minister by virtue of a parliamentary vote. This seemingly heralds a socialist government after 46 years in that country. But the LDP, being the major partner in the coalition with 206 members in parliament compared to SDP's 74, is on the driver's seat.

This development should not make us sit up. In fact, the words 'surprise' and 'unlikely' would start sounding fashionable the moment we recall how rapidly the options were shrinking for the divided Japanese leadership to come to terms with each other before the political crisis went out of their hands. The coalition that put an end to the continual LDP rule since 1955, last summer, revealed its weaknesses when the two prime ministers Hosokawa and Hata fell in quick succession. Yes, Hosokawa left the scene with a stigma of alleged financial irregularities. Yet, some of his reform measures distancing him from his colleagues in the coalition, he could not even venture to enlist their support to stay on. What a political tempest Japan has been through can be easily gauged from the fact that the country has had altogether four prime ministers in a year.

In the coming together of the long-time arch rivals LDP and SDP one discerns a certain change in the Japanese leadership psyche for a government of national reconciliation in place of an unalloyed party or partisan government. The catharsis of interests makes a very interesting reading: the pro-business plank of the LDP synthesising with the pro-labour one of the SDP. The SDP was even a sympathiser of the former Soviet Union.

Thirteen of the 22-member Murayama cabinet are going to be from the Liberal Democratic party, according to first reports from Tokyo. This may be interpreted as the price extracted by the LDP for its coalescing with the SDP or even as a sort of comeback staged indirectly by the Liberal Democrats. On the other hand, the advocates of proportional representation may see a vindication of their idea in this. However, all elective and pluralistic democracies may wake up to a replay of the Japanese experience in their situations insofar as facing the eventuality of minority governments goes. But the notable feature for us is how the two highly adversarial political parties have agreed to work together in Japan.

Pundits are apt to say, the new socialist Prime Minister's stay for any good length of time hinges on the approach he takes to political and economic reforms, especially of the type his coalition partner the LDP may be sensitive about. The issues on the front burner, however, are corruption, taxes and national security. A clear picture of Japan's political future will emerge after the next general elections which Murayama would like to hold sooner than later. Meanwhile, we welcome the filling of the leadership void in that friendly country.

Political Back-up Behind the Economy Missing

All parties should realize that there is no alternative to discussions and debate in a democracy. There is also no point in holding on to an idea without leaving any scope for negotiation, especially when the opportunity cost of each day foregone is so high.

by Jalal Alamgir

day missed, the people of Bangladesh lose taka 271 crore in incomes. The lawmakers of a country which ranks in the lowest cluster of wealth and human development indices certainly cannot afford to waste a single hour in fruitless pursuits. And when they squander weeks after weeks in unnecessary standstills, perhaps one cannot but agree with the notion championed by the French Nobel laureate Albert Camus that absurdity is the central theme of modern civilization. Well, at least in modern Bangladeshi political civilizat

ITH each productive

Always suspicious of one another, the political parties here - over one hundred of them - exist in a counter-productive environment that they themselves had created Clashes of viewpoints are seldom treated in a respectful and negotiable manner. Political movements seldom have clear ideological or practical objectives. The ruling party usually confuses party ideals with state goals. The opposition is seen as anti-state. Unified efforts towards national development become unfeasible, as development remains a vague project of the party in power, indiscriminately criticized by the opposition. Such

cracy meets the head

of the world's strongest

democracy, economic issues

summit since India started its

liberalisation programme after

years of state control of the

economy. Confident of its eco-

nomic potential, Prime

Minister PV Narasimha Rao is

keen to integrate India into

the US-dominated global

The need to improve rela-

tions with Washington has

never been felt more acutely.

As the economic liberalisation

programme gains momentum,

New Delhi expects the US to

The US is India's largest

trading partner, buying 20 per

cent of India's exports besides

being the largest investor - its

investments in 1993 were 42

per cent of the \$2 billion total

investments approved by New

for building on these figures.

US exports to India account

for only 0.6 per cent of its total

trade, and US investments to-

tal a meagre 0.3 per cent of its

such moves as Washington's

recent decision to lift restric-

tions on Indian handloom ex-

Rao has been encouraged by

A huge domestic con-

stituency in India favours

closer ties, including the new

outward-looking entrepreneu-

rs, a growing middle class of

more than 200 million bitten

by the bug of consumerism.

and professionals - India has

the third largest technical and

scientific workforce in the

two countries have been poor

still suspicious of US motives,

just as Washington was suspi-

cious of India's close economic

and military ties with the

Soviet Union during the Cold

ings came in Rao's statement

to Parliament in May: "The im-

plications of the end of Cold

An echo of those old feel-

for years, and many Indians are

But relations between the

investments worldwide.

There is immense potential

play a big role in its growth.

economy.

Delhi.

It is the first Indo-US

will dominate the agenda.

politics something of has been the essence of democracy in Bangladesh.

Ironically, these same conditions forced the playwright Vaclay Havel, orchestrator of the "Velvet Revolution" for democracy in Czechoslovakia, to quit the Presidency. Not being a career politician, he could not put up with wasting valuable time, energy, and resources in prolonged quarrels. The situation was, in his words, this: "Partisan considerations visibly take precedence over pragmatic attempts to arrive at reasonable and useful solutions to problems Supporting the government in a good cause is practically shameful; kicking it in the shins, on the other hand, is praiseworthy." The present stalemate has

gone beyond reasonable bounds. Add to it the Prokrichi movement and the fatwa gangs, the hartals and the characteristic general indecision of the ruling party, and you get a sum-total of economic costs which must be staggering. In view of this enormous inefficiency and loss, can we not introduce in

golden Handshake now going on in the public enterprises?

The South African leaders

foresaw the expenses involved in long political deadlocks. They therefore wanted the nascent democratic government to be a coalition, and agreed to keep cabinet seats for all parties that would get over 5 per cent of the national vote. We missed a similar opportunity of having a totally different, and perhaps spirited, cabinet; so we bear with this present one. But there is scope, and it is high time, to have some bottomline agreements, maybe along the lines enunciated in the preamble to our constitution. The greater responsibility to bring up these lies with the Treasury Bench. The reason is that the ruling party derives its authority from the state, and the needs of the state must override the needs of the party for as long

as the party is in power. The basis of such agreements can be formulated through some existing common goals of the major parties As a start, both BNP and AL

mission needs to be strengthened In addition to enhanced powers, the Commission especially needs to grasp that an election dispute cannot be resolved in the courtroom manner; rather it should emphasize dynamic decision-

making involving more than

Returning Officer.

reform propaganda.

just reports from the

agree that the Election Com-

Second both parties, in various meetings and seminars, have expressed support for economic reforms in one form or another. This political consensus needs to be materialized into the explicit understanding that in our context reforms are essential to engender sustainable growth, regardless of which party comes to power. Political leaders should avoid anti-

Third, and the most controversial of all, is the issue of elections under a caretaker government. Even here we find a common strand of thought: An open, public debate should take place between the two political leaders Whatever the result of the de-

bate, it will serve two purposes. One, it will inform the country firsthand about the specific position of each party. Two . it will certainly open some avenues to rapprochement. So far, there has not been any direct public communication between the two parties: the onlymeans of communication have been haphazard newspaper statements and some secret surrogate contacts. Such methods are not even good enough for conveying messages, let alone resolve a national political crisis. A summit meeting, in the form of a debate, might show light at the end of this tunnel we are all getting fed up with.

All parties should realize that there is no alternative to discussions and debate in a democracy. There is also no point in holding on to an idea without leaving any scope for negotiation, especially when the opportunity cost of each day foregone is so high. As Dr. Boutros-Ghali recently remarked about adapting to different circumstances. "Only stupid people don't change their minds."

Politics, and all aspects public policymaking in a least developed country ultimately must centre on the issue of development. In their budget reaction. AL registered a concern about the growing number of absolute poor in the country Surely they realize that at least a 7 per cent annual growth rate must be sustained in order to gradually reverse the situation. On the other hand, BNP needs to un derstand that as the party in power, it is its duty to the state to take active steps for resolving the ever-increasing political problems, rather than sulking in a corner of a futile parliament. Otherwise, the rising daily expenses will have to be borne by the citizens of a very angry electorate.

As the country tries to move towards growth higher than the 4.5 per cent rate in recent years, the economy needs stronger and quicker support from the polity. If our normal production level continues with the present political stalemate, we might have to replace the 365-day year with a 600-day fiscal year just to maintain our present development advances against the enormous costs. But that is only a figure of Speech . At any rate, there a single more day to lose?

Money Talks when the Strongest Meets the Largest

D K Joshi writes from New Delhi THEN the leader of the world's largest demo-

India's rapid economic liberalisation offers the prospect of better relations with the US, mired for years in mutual suspicion. But, some sensitive issues remain, including Washington's policy on Kashmir and nuclear proliferation.



Narasimha Rao: Indian Prime Minister



Bill Clinton:

War are yet to unfold... the fact that there is only one superpower now is fraught with dangers for developing countries who have, therefore, to come together and become more vocal."

Certainly, India, as a founder member of the Non-Aligned Movement and an articulate voice of the developing world in international bodies. does not want to lose its traditional independence in foreign

Indian suspicions are based on Washington's perceived support for India's arch-enemy Pakistan, and specifically by Washington's opposition to India's nuclear and missile programmes and its criticism of human rights violations in Kashmir, India's only Muslim majority state.

Washington wants India to "cap" its missile programme and sign the 1968 nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). New Delhi opposes the Treaty on the grounds that it is discriminatory.

Many officials believe US efforts to halt the proliferation of nuclear weapons and to deny

US President

missile technology to Third

World countries is designed to

maintain its strategic superi-

To allay opposition parties apprehensions about the visit, Rao told Parliament that India would not accept any discriminatory NPT. He also ruled out capping the country's missile programme under pressure "from any quarter."

He said: "Everything is misunderstood... there is not a word on capping our missile programme. Nor have they asked us to sign the NPT."

Opposition parties consider Rao's denial of arm-twisting by Washington less than convincing in the light of the recent visit to India and Pakistan by US Deputy secretary of State Strobe Talbott and official talks in London between India and the US on nuclear non-prolif-

Members of the right-wing Hindu revivalist Bharativa Janata Party, the biggest opposition group in Parliament, say that Washington continues its "tilt" towards Pakistan as reflected in a recent decision to supply 38 F16 bombers to Washington's Cold War ally.

The only political concession India seems to have received is on its dispute with Pakistan over control of the state of Kashmir. From disputing Kashmir's accession to India, Washington has now moved to the position that the dispute should be resolved "in accordance with the Simla accord." (Signed by India and Pakistan in 1972, the accord

says that the Kashmir issue should be discussed bilaterally and not in an international forum.)

Some policymakers, however, suspect the shift may be a ruse to divert attention from US efforts to open India's burgeoning consumer market to American products.

US President Bill Clinton might have had a more personal rapport with the youthful

Prime Minister to visit the US in 1985, who charmed the American media with his performance - rather than with the ageing, scholarly Rao.

Nevertheless, Rao is the first Indian premier to hold talks with a US president since the end of the Cold War and the break-up of the Soviet Union, and hopes are high that the meeting will help Indo-US relations emerge, according to Talbott's words, "out of the mire of suspicion and neglect."

D K JOSHI is a senior Indian journalist.

GEMINI NEWS

OPINION

Market Forces: Reinventing Government

The great English political theorist Thomas Hobbes (1659) preached how people time in over forty years.

are required to be tamed, to be controlled, to be leashed or else, they be a perennial threat to peace and prosperity. He so argued that, men in their natural existence are self-seeking. brutish and constantly at war with one another. To escape the dangers of this anarchy. groups of men agree to set up artificial body (monarchy) for maintaining peace - by con-

trolling others. lutely to the sovereign

Inird World context we submit to a centralised bureaucracy called the government. In sharp contrast to this, John Locke (1689), the English philosopher, the founder of British empiricism. the prophet of reason contradicts Hobbes by asserting man's inherent goodness, in strong individualism and equality without the need to be leashed by another group of men. The state, he held, is formed by social contract and should be guided by belief in natural rights - economic, social or

political This was in essence a plea for democracy, which bore fruit in the US constitution. Today the western or the first world, starting with the founding of USA are stron Lockeans. They are all individualists and had long rejected the Hobbesian monarchism of past Europe, the very continent the present Americans fled to become independent equals.

The western commoners no more look up to their superior to give them bread or even to govern them. They are un leashed humans technologically advanced because, they have the individual freedom to act towards progress and prosperity.

Ingloriously, in the huge Third World we still look upon the benevolence of authority.

In all this time, in the ab- tions, a institution that checks and balances power, the government has acquired its own perpetuating selfish interest vigorously explained to the people as the interest of the state. The mystique of power and authority still hangs high in the Third World.

The institution of the government was created to protect life and property. Today it dictates the quality of life we lead and the kind of property we acquire. Something like the PROKICHI movement if, properly backed by large political parties, can securely serve to reinvent government to serve the people first, for the first eralisation in India and

Nizam Ahmad

We the people are dearly paying around Taka ten thousand crore annually to maintain this bureaucracy. This large machinery produces files, delays and destroys projects and obstructs individual freedom and potential. The World Bank's golden handshake should begin here by retrenching excess government personnel and departments. A considerable part of The people submit abso- the resources thus saved, should be urgently spent on monarch and in the modern social and physical infrastruc-

> A large opposition like the Awami League (AL) can energetically act to convince the people and business can be lightened and made easy to

Also, the government's Hobbesian culture of control by regulations must be ended and replaced with a bureaucracy respectful of natural rights of the individual. However, it is no doubt that Lenin's October revolution of 1917, further emboldened the minds of our past great leaders to a misguided fact that, absolute authority can do wonders if, that authority is not vested in the monarchy but in the hands of a few good men with good intentions. All powerful planning commissions and 5-year plannings founded in the USSR to shape the economy, were duplicated in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. It was evident that, AL government's sudden turn to economic and political centralisation (1972-75) shook the trusting relationship it had with the people. Common human errors were grave political disasters in the absence of mature and functioning institu-

Grudgingly, India and Pakistan are now undertaking wide liberalisation programmes and, AL too must endeavour to explain what the We look upon the superior free market and a reinvented body of the government to government would mean lest provide the necessities of life. they are once again quickly We abide and respect the and wrongly blamed for serv power of the government to do ing designs of greater powers good despite its years of fail- that is, if they win parliamen tary majority in coming elecderegulated sence of full-blown democratic Bangladesh economy would mean massive trade and economic interaction with India and others. The benefit of this liberalisation would, most certainly be the common people's. They would enjoy low prices and an expanded trade, commerce and employment oppor tunities. A true free market not practised by this government, can offset initial advantages of India or others. Agile trading and manufacturing entrepreneurs, investing in research and technology, can happily invade the huge Indian market and other SAARC do

. After recent economic lib

Pakistan, their exports have increased unexpectedly, imports did not flood home markets and foreign exchange reserves had soared. Their economists had viewed liberalisation differently only to prove again that, liberty uncaged is more rewarding than futuristic economic planning and bureaucratic spending.

Our basic infrastructural demand (the industrial backbone) would probably require two dozen capital intensive PDBs, DESAs, WASAs, T&Ts, gas companies, thousands of safe river and road transports. million hospital beds, more skilled doctors, more engineering universities (BUET) and scores of other skill acquiring institutions. These new investments will indirectly help develop new townships. shopping arcades, parking lots, warehouses, new trade and manufacturing, housing, hotel and restaurants, modernised ports, busier airports, banking and financial services, and finally upgrade our international ratings for scare free

trade and investments. Bangladeshis can no longer be afraid of a close competition or association with Indians, Pakistanis or with the man from the West. We fought the bloodiest battle in 1971 to secure our cultural and economic rights. Our right to engage in commerce or industry is not obstructed or discriminated as before. Today we are on the same footing as others to compete with people and organisations of different cultural and economic backgrounds.

Unfortunately, we are still lured to believe in the government's ability to turn our economic despair and misfortunes, but not in the individual's - as in a free market. Government control, planning and protectionism are tricky and vast subjects. On the other hand, freedom and liberty are simple, easy and casual Natural rights do not require everyday debates and lengthy speeches. What is natural and easy has been made complex and difficult. The majority of us are therefore voiceless, helpless, and poor.

The supremacy of the market can wash away the economic power structure of the government housed in the secretariat. The market is the natural rule of the people, denied by centralised bureaucracy continually deciding, and harming, economic interest of the individual. The consumer is refused his freedom of choice. The producer is obstructed in his freedom of ac-

The government must be reinvented, services and utilities privatised, controls abolished, regulations relaxed and consequently the bureaucracy's power to control others decentralised for everybody's prosperity.

The writer is exchairman. MOER

Judicial enquiry

Sir, The Government of Pakistan has recently instituted a judicial enquiry by a committee comprising five judges including the Supreme Court Judge as chairman so as to unearth the alleged corrupt practices of politicians, bureaucrats, defense highups etc in monetary transactions of Mehran Banh Limited. Only the other day a court in Abu Dhabi has penalised top officials of BCCI which collapsed two years back.

Under the above backdrops there is no reason why such judicial enquiries or court cases are not instituted against Bangladesh Commerce and Investment Ltd. which has stopped all operations as per Govt. order. Lacs of depositors of BCIL, have become penniless overnight but, it appears that, no proper action has yet been taken to recover the money of the clients.

In the context of accountability and transparency, so often preached by the peers of the government, it is time to translate those words into proper actions.

Sadig Alee Maghbazar, Dhaka

Brain frequencies: Silva method

Sir, It has been revealed by the researchers of the western countries that a human brain vibrates a certain rate depending one's physical

condition. It has been observed that our brain vibrates at about 20 cycles per second when we are wide awake. When we retire for resting our brain frequency goes down and when we fall asleep the brain frequency goes below 14 cycles per second. When we are in deep sleep our brain frequency goes down to about 6/7 cycles per second. At this stage our repair mechanism of the body (immune mechanism) becomes very active and we become fresh after a sleep.

Jose Silva, an American researcher (born in Spain) has found that if lower frequencies below 14 cycles per second could be attained by a person when he is awake, instead of asleep, then his body repair mechanism could be activated when he is awake land at work). Mr Silva has also devised procedures for attaining this low frequency state when a person is awake. People all over the world are being benefited from Mr Silva's devised method.

Mohammadpur, Dhaka.

AHM Zahirul Hague

Sir, Believe it or not, a nation is growing shorter, and the one and only nation that has developed this phenomenon is none but least developed Bangladesh.

Dwarf nation!

The UN report reveals, average height of 12-year-old boys in rural areas dropped by 7% during 1937-82 period.

This agri-rich nation suffer ing from physical growth retardation obviously overgrows the discrepancy about the standard of the state's food Should nutrition deficiency be the most responsible factor for this "dwarf syndrom" as well as for natal deformation

fields.

under subsistence level could not be treated as sick and should be taken care of as underprivileged instead. This is not all about the human development in this robotic era, because physical features are only relative, i.e. short or tall, , fat or slim, strong or weak, that do not bedevil the whole world.

besides gene limitation, ma-

jority of the populace surviving

rather turn out to be savior from time to time. Many a genii who were behind the growing civilization were short people, as are many record holders in various

To this developing country however, this unprecedented abnormal growth must not be the beginning of the end of everything, while she still has a plenty of reasons to live with, energized by a role model as giant as Simon's reinforced with the strength of Lilliputs coupled with her "tallest man on earth, that can help her incredible-shrinking-men outgrow the odds in the upcom ing periods.

M Rahman Zila School Road, Mymensingh