

After the summit in Tehran ...

NAM must reinvent itself

THE end of the summit of non-aligned nations in Tehran raises a question and demonstrates a reality. The question relates to whether the non-aligned movement can in the times immediately ahead reassert its prominence in global politics. And the reality is that despite some very difficult obstacles in their way, member states of NAM have it in them to overcome or skirt around the obstacles if indeed they mean to speak in a unified voice on the global stage. The important message from Tehran, though, is that NAM continues to be a forum which unites rather than divides those nations which constitute it at present. And the fact that it is Iran, embattled as it is over questions of its nuclear intentions, which has been host to the summit makes it clear that member-states are willing to speak their mind through this forum through defying unwelcome pressure to the contrary.

That expression of mind is important given that in a world where a lone superpower operates no-holds barred, it becomes necessary for a countervailing force to emerge in the interest of the global community as a whole. Of course, no one expects NAM to return to the glory it exemplified in the 1950s and 1960s at the height of the Cold War. The realities of today being quite removed from those of earlier times, NAM can encourage its member states into pooling their resources, especially in the economic sense and thereby promote the well-being of their peoples. But such a goal entails a wholesome, purposeful working of democracy within NAM member states, for without popular participation in the political system it becomes rather difficult to pursue such goals as ensuring economic justice, alleviating poverty, developing health care and adapting to evolving international conditions. Fortunately, a fairly large number of countries in NAM are today home to democratic governments, however flawed, and are therefore in a position to bring about the change society needs. Among these nations are regional powers like India, a fact that could be a spur to further progress within NAM territory.

The summit has shown that NAM has not become irrelevant. But if it means to play a definitive role in today's world, it needs to reinvent itself through a clear outlining of its objectives. Paramount among those objectives must be ensuring social justice within member states and have a positive participation as a united force on the global stage.

MPs impeding effective local governance

Ensure devolution of power to local govt. representatives

GRIEVANCES of the upazila and UP chairmen and members were demonstrated once again in the findings of a year-long study conducted by Centre for Urban Studies and Unnayan Shamannay. The study has found that interventions from local lawmakers and the UNOs are standing in the way of independent functioning of upazilas and UPs.

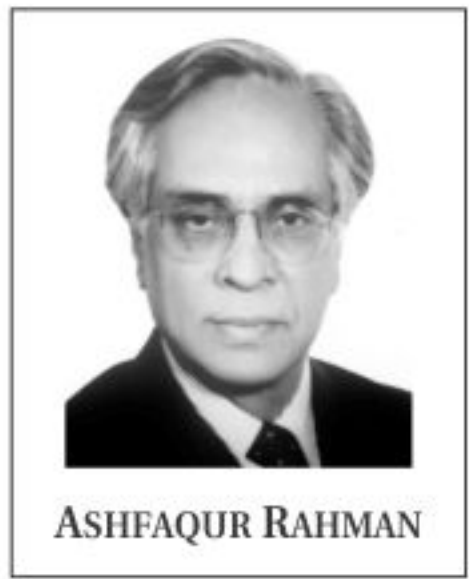
It is worthwhile to note that the Upazila Parishad Act, 1998 vested executive powers of the parishad in the upazila chairmen but local lawmakers and other appointed government officers still exercise considerable influence over the activities of democratically elected representatives in the upazilas. In fact, devolution of power has fundamentally been undercut by making advisory role of the MPs mandatory. The poor financial status of the Ups is reflected through their dependence on the UNOs for funding sources.

Although the Union Parishad Act 2009 provides for people's participation in preparing budgets and other development plans for the UPs, Section 73 (1) of the act authorises bureaucracy to give direction on UP activities. Two of the most pivotal tiers of local government are thus made virtually ineffective.

Local government was supposed to be the cornerstone of participatory democracy. When two essential tiers of local government have been weakened the idea of a participatory democracy remains a far cry.

We therefore urge the government to revoke those sections and provisions of the laws that hinder independent and effective functioning of the elected repre-

SUNDAY POUCH



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nine head of states, two kings, seven prime ministers, including our prime minister, and twenty five foreign ministers attended along with representatives from all the 120 member states. Seventeen observer countries along with ten member organisations like the UN, the African Union and the Arab League also sent their delegations.

This was the first time since the 1979 Iranian Revolution that the country hosted so many high foreign dignitaries to an international conference. In spite of attempts made by the USA and Israel to discourage member countries to join the conference, the member countries ultimately sent their delegations. Thus, Iran could claim that it was not isolated diplomatically by the world. The Iranian government declared a six-day holiday for the residents of Tehran when the meetings were held. As an added incentive for them to leave the city, it also made available to each adult Tehrani an additional eight gallons of subsidised petrol to allow them to take a vacation. In their place, however, seven thousand foreigners crowded into the city for the meetings. For their protection the government mobilised 110,000 security personnel for the duration of the Summit.

Three major issues dominated the agenda of the Summit meeting. They were the prevailing crisis in Syria, the Iranian nuclear programme and world terrorism. Several other issues took centre stage as the meetings progressed. These included the neutrality of the United Nations due to inordinate power given to the Security Council, which is mainly comprised of western powers. The issue of giving greater voice to developing countries in world affairs as well as abstaining from taking sides in global conflicts was also mooted. More common issues like the question of Palestine, the ill-effects of climate change, the need to increase trade among the non-aligned countries, etc also engaged the leaders. Secretary General of the United

Nations, Mr. Ban Ki Moon, in spite of being urged by the West not to go to Tehran, was at hand to meet the leaders of the host country before the Conference, and other world leaders during the meetings. However, the Secretary General was visibly distraught when the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Khamenei, attacked the US government led by President Obama. The Ayatullah said that the US and its allies misuse the "illogical, unjust and completely undemocratic structure of the UN Security Council to impose their bullying on the world. This is a flagrant form of dictatorship which is antiquated and obsolete and whose expiry date has passed." He added that "the US and its accomplices protect the interest of the West in the name of human rights, interferes militarily in other countries in the name of democracy, and target defenseless people in

villages and cities with their bombs and weapons (read drone attacks in Pakistan) in the name of combating terrorism."

Mr. Ban Ki Moon, however, seized the opportunity of his presence in Teheran to flag Iran's disputed nuclear programme. He told Ayatullah Khamenei as well as President Ahmadinejad to take "concrete" steps to fix the worsening international showdown over their atomic activities. He stressed "the cost of Iran's current trajectory" which "risked degenerating into a war of violence." He also took issue with Iran's leaders over their recent description of Israel as a "cancerous tumour" that should be cut off from the Middle East. He made it clearly known to the Iranian leaders that he "strongly objected to these words." The Secretary General also called upon Iran to release "opposition leaders, human right activists, journalists to promote public discourse there."

But besides the verbal sparring, the coup of the Summit meeting was the support given by the new Egyptian President Morsi to the Syrian opposition who are now engaged in a military confrontation with the forces of President Assad. Morsi, who till recently was a mem-

ber of the Muslim Brotherhood, was elected president and had gained political legitimacy. He then, for the first time, jettisoned the extra constitutional powers that his military had usurped. He, therefore, came to the NAM Summit as a star guest. Everyone, including the Iranians, expected that he would advocate reconciliation between the fighting parties. Instead, President Morsi stunned everyone when he said that the "oppressive" Syrian regime had lost all legitimacy. He even rebuked his Iranian hosts for supporting President Assad. This was like a verbal hand grenade lobbed at Iran's shocked leadership.

With such a strong stand President Morsi immediately stood out as a leader and demonstrated Egypt's renewed regional leadership ambitions. In one quick move, he had thrown Egypt's weight behind a powerful group of Sunni states, including Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey, which support the Syrian rebels. In a sense, Iran is the only country that now stands with the increasingly besieged President Assad and his Shia-Alawite regime. However, Morsi urged diplomacy rather than use of force to bring any regime change in Syria. He proposed a 4-nation contact group including Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran to resolve the factional crisis.

Another situation that merited the attention of all those present at the Summit was whether President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority would finally come to Tehran to represent his people's case for an independent state. Initially, he was unwilling to come if Ismail Haniyah, a Hamas leader who is close to Iran and controls the Gaza Strip, would be present. Iran had earlier invited both the leaders. If Haniyah came it would embarrass President Mahmoud Abbas and the world would get the impression that Palestinians did not have a single leadership. Good sense, however, prevailed on Haniyah and he finally did not come. President Mahmoud Abbas took his seat in the NAM

Conference representing all Palestinians.

So what did this NAM summit achieve? Some analysts say that it is the host country Iran that gained much. Not only was it able to attract so many important leaders, all 120 member states and observer countries had also sent delegations. It proved once again that Iran, in spite of sanctions and other approbations, is not diplomatically isolated. Iran will now hold the mantle of leadership of NAM for the next three years. This will give it political power and diplomatic leverage. Iran would also enjoy great international prestige.

In concrete terms, a way out of the Syrian situation was suggested by the members, including Egypt, although it remains unresolved. President Morsi grabbed the opportunity and displayed to the world Egypt's new and colourful plumes. The balmy breeze of the Arab Spring floated through the precinct of the Conference where dictators and their potentates were present. It was made known that they must change soon or be caught up by history.

The final document that was adopted by the 120 member states condemned all unilateral sanctions. It also backed peaceful use of nuclear energy for all. It supported the creation of a Palestinian state. It urged all countries to start nuclear disarmament if they had any stockpile. Human rights free from political agenda and an end to "Islamophobia" were also agreed upon.

Finally, to many analysts, Israel, which had all along felt that it would be able to dissuade many members of the NAM from travelling to Tehran, was left deeply disappointed. The western press, which had continued to harp on the old theme that NAM summit meetings were irrelevant in the present international context, found that the context was itself changing very fast. A fresh wind seems to be blowing and scattering the politics of the past. The second largest gathering of states in the world after the UN was realising that together they had much to offer to resolve intractable issues which the UN Security Council was unable to do as it remained locked in its own outdated rivalries.

With time, the 16th NAM Summit will reveal what more was achieved there.

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POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



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(UNFCC) will resume in Bangkok, Thailand in the first week of September in preparation for the Eighteenth Conference of Parties (COP18) which will be held in December 2012 in Doha, Qatar.

There a number of outstanding issues which are expected to be negotiated in Bangkok in order to arrive at a decision at COP18 in December. Some of the key issues are described below.

Kyoto Protocol

The first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol is due to expire at the end of December 2012 and will need to be replaced by a second commitment period. It was originally hoped that this would be achieved at COP15 in Copenhagen, Denmark in December 2009 but that summit ended in failure to achieve

an agreement.

Last year at COP17 in Durban, South Africa, a compromise agreement for an "interim" second commitment period from the European Union resulted in a compromise outcome. This interim second commitment period up to 2017 has now been endorsed by some other developed countries including Australia and New Zealand but with the expectation that all other countries, including the United States of America, China and India, will agree to a new post-Kyoto protocol (or agreement), which will replace the original Kyoto Protocol in a more comprehensive manner by 2017 (or 2020 at the latest).

These negotiations will be amongst the most politically sensitive in Doha in December.

Adaptation

The issues under adaptation are less contentious and revolve around operationalising the deci-

sions that were reached in Durban last December, which include the setting up of the Adaptation Committee and preparing guidelines for countries to carry out their National Adaptation Plans (NAP). The other issue that remains is how much funding the developed countries will provide to the developing countries to carry out their NAPs.

Funding

This will remain one of the most contentious topics as always with the main issue being how to operationalise the Green Climate Fund (GCF) through which the developed countries have promised to channel up to \$100 billion a year from 2020. The Executive Committee of the GCF has been set up and Bangladesh has been included in it. It will develop the modalities for the operationalising the GCF.

Another issue related to funding is what happens between 2013 (when

the Fast Start Finance of \$30 Billion over 3 years ends) and 2020 when the GCF funding starts. The developed countries will be pressed in Bangkok to say what they are willing to provide between 2013 and 2020.

Loss and damage

This is a new topic that was agreed in Durban and there will be a workshop in Bangkok to prepare for a possible decision on COP18 in December. Bangladesh will be well represented in this technical workshop to share work being done in Bangladesh.

Role of Bangladesh and LDCs

Bangladesh, as a key member of the Least Developed Countries (LDC) Group, will continue to play a key role in support of the group in the negotiations. The LDC Group is currently chaired by the Gambia, which will hand over the Chairmanship to Nepal after COP18.

Bangladesh has already offered to support Nepal in its role as LDC Chair from next year.

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THIS DAY IN HISTORY

September 2

44 BC Pharaoh Cleopatra VII of Egypt declares her son co-ruler as Ptolemy XV Caesarion.

31 BC Final War of the Roman Republic: Battle of Actium off the western coast of Greece, forces of Octavian defeat troops under Mark Antony and Cleopatra.

1945 World War II: Combat ends in the Pacific Theater: the Instrument of Surrender of Japan is signed by Japanese Foreign Minister Mamoru Shigemitsu and accepted aboard the battleship USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay.

1945 Vietnam declares its independence, forming the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

1946 The Interim Government of India is formed with Jawaharlal Nehru as Vice President with the powers of a Prime Minister.